

# **The Questions Children Ask**



# The Questions Children Ask

And the answers to those  
“hard” questions about divorce,  
adoption, race, religion,  
life, and death.



*by Murray Polner  
and Arthur Barron*

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## *Dedication*

**TO OUR DEAR CHILDREN**

*Beth, Alex, and Robert Polner  
Bruce and Andrew Barron.*



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# *Preface*

This attempt to understand a child's world through his questions is a work of many people. It represents a sort of group therapy, a sharing of experiences. Parent, child, psychiatric social worker, teacher, clergyman, physician and others, shrewd observers many of them, have allowed us to listen in to their innermost thoughts and private conversations. If there is any justification for this book, it is that anyone responsible for children can learn from the experiences of others, that most situations are far from unique, and that the reader now has an opportunity to test his attitudes and practices against the reality of people who have here responded honestly.

This modest book is grounded on a wide range of interviews with people of all economic and social classes, from all parts of the country. In no way do we claim that these approaches are systematic or definitive. Indeed, the point to remember here is that there are few easy answers and almost no standard platitudes that will apply to all the children of all the people. Instead, much depends on the child, the family, and the presence or absence of a sympathetic environment.

We should like to express our special appreciation to Evelyn Seidel who conducted many of the interviews, to

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Eda J. LeShan for her always valuable suggestions and incisive comments, to Henry Steckel for suggesting a title and, above all, to Louise Polner for her perceptive criticism of the manuscript in all its stages.

# I

## THE QUESTIONS CHILDREN ASK: AN INTRODUCTION





# *The Questions Children Ask*

This is a book about questions that are most frequently asked by children between the ages of five and twelve. They are not easy questions. They are, in fact, impossibly difficult to answer. But they are part of life, and they must be confronted. For adults, this is hard enough to do. For children, it is a more formidable task. It is hoped that the chapters that follow will help lighten that task.

What are these questions?

They are *not* the ones found in school texts, not the questions that deal with the world of the measurable and definable, with gravity, and dates, and numbers and places . . . with the neatly ordered world of facts. These questions do not ask how fast does a rock fall? When did the Puritans land here? How many quarts in a gallon? Where is Belfast? For such questions there are answers. There are teachers, libraries, and the encyclopedia.

Instead, this book deals with the questions for which there are no real answers, nor teachers, nor libraries, nor encyclopedias. These are questions that deal with the mysteries of life . . . with the baffling complexities of human relationships. Why did Grandma die? Why am I black? Why doesn't Daddy live at home? Will there be war?

All questions are important to children. But these truly unanswerable questions are of special importance. This is

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so for obvious reasons. Clearly, these questions deal with what is most personal and intimate. They grow out of what are the central experiences in a child's life. They are charged with emotion. They help shape, not merely the child's knowledge of the world, but his attitudes toward it, his values, beliefs, and philosophy as well. Finally, these are the questions which the child asks *only* the parent, or which he asks the parent first, and this, too, makes these questions especially important.

In all this, of course, there is risk and danger. If these questions are evaded; if they are ignored, or put off, or not taken seriously; if they are answered badly (not "correctly" but badly—a distinction which will be made clear later), harm may be done. Not irreparable harm perhaps, or even very damaging harm, but harm nonetheless. A bad answer will mean a child's capacity for growth will be that much curtailed. His confidence that much diminished. His trust in the world and in himself that much shaken.

But if there is risk, there is also opportunity and reward. This is true, not only for the child, who will benefit from wise and sensitive answers. It is true, no less, of the parent, who will feel the pleasure and the strength of helping. It is true, also, of the relationship between parent and child, which may be profoundly enriched.

It would be foolhardy to attempt in this book to provide formula answers to the fundamental questions about life and the world posed by children. No such answers exist. They do not exist in the abstract, nor do they exist in the concrete terms of the widely different needs of children and parents in widely different family environments. Still, it is possible to provide basic guidelines which can be of real help, guidelines

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both for *what* to tell and for how to tell it. Basically, it is the point of view of this book that: (1) curiosity plays a vital role in the child's intellectual, psychological, and social development; (2) parents can tap this curiosity and use it as a dynamic force in increasing the child's mastery of himself and the world; (3) while no perfect answers exist, certain answers are far more valid than others; certain mistakes can be avoided. Or as one perceptive father once said, "If they're old enough to ask a question, they deserve some sort of proper answer."



# **II**

## **THE MYSTERIES OF LIFE**



## *Birth And Sex*

Several years ago a study compared what Polish parents had told their children about birth and sex in three distinct generations: 1903, 1934, and 1960.\* The results indicated that the rare father and mother had discussed these subjects in 1903 or 1934; by 1960, however, most of the adolescents interviewed said they had "received their sex instruction from their parents, and nearly one-half found out about sex before the age of twelve." It remains for future psychologists, sociologists, and, perhaps, criminologists to determine to what degree parental sex education and early information make Johnny and Mary remain heterosexual, more moral, less adulterous, wiser, and calmer. In any event, at this juncture of child-rearing practices, almost everyone responsible for the sex education of the young counsels clear, precise information at propitious moments, with one precaution—that children in this category cannot anticipate the emotional responses of sex, and should not be overstimulated. Here lies much of the problem, involving more how to say it than when to say it.

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*Teacher, twenty-three, Augusta, Georgia:*

It was my first year as a teacher. I was very young and very green. One afternoon, in my first-grade class a new little boy raised his hand and out of the blue asked me, "Where do I come from?" Believe me, I was startled, then embarrassed, but I felt that I had to answer the child's question. I remember that all eyes were on me as I began to unfold to the class the story of their conception, how Daddy had planted a seed in Mommy, and all that, and I finally ended it all up in a maternity ward.

"Is that clear?" I asked the boy.

"Is what clear?" he answered.

"Where you come from." I remember shouting at him.

"But," he said. "I only want to know where I live, the name of this city."

I guess I should have been more perceptive, and more sensitive. My principal later told me that I should have asked him *why* he wanted to know. I had received a reprieve. But sooner or later, both school and home and church would have to give him a more serious, a more complex answer about birth and sex. That time, say between six and twelve, or what one writer I once read described as "the golden age for parental instruction," is the single best time to work on it.

*A Pittsburgh mother of an eight-year-old girl explains her attitude.*

I learned from experience. My parents were always free with my brother and me, and we were with our own chil-



dren. But I don't think that absolute license and freedom work the same with all children. Now, I believe that parents or clergy or school or anyone has an obligation not to overburden the child with more information than he or she asks for or needs. When a question is asked there should be a simple, honest answer that takes the child's age and level of maturity into consideration.

Take my brother Al, for example. When his son and daughter reached puberty he gave the boy a contraceptive and his daughter a diaphragm in order that they might appreciate the techniques involved in sexual intercourse. He told them he hoped they wouldn't need them, but if they did, to use them.

My husband and I were appalled. We felt that the shock of sex relations to kids may often be too much to digest properly. After all, I think most kids often believe that the sex act is a bodily attack, pretty degrading and dirty. How in heaven's name can they understand the emotional experience?

Something akin to that happened to us with Linda, our daughter. When she was eight I insisted, over my husband's objections, in going into detail with the child. My God, I think I told her everything! Well, one day in November, while we were having our house painted, Linda went up to a painter, a nice old Jewish man, and asked him if he had any children. When he told her that he didn't she said, "Oh, that's a shame, but it's really very easy to have babies." And she proceeded to detail every bit of the process. The poor man was absolutely shocked.

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*Housewife, thirty-nine, Great Neck, New York:*

I was always willing to tell my children everything about sex matters. I have four children, and I recall explaining it all to my eldest, then eleven. I was pretty pleased with myself, what with taking the girl into my confidence and everything. Suddenly Marlene, my girl, screamed out, "Mother, how awful, did you do *that*, four times?" Who knows how kids' minds work?

"Where do babies come from?"

*The speaker is a professor of child development and a mother of two. She teaches at a large southern university.*

Well, of course, you could say the stork or hospital brings them, or they come from under cabbage leaves, or any of the fanciful places that babies come from. But if you say "the baby grows in Mother's tummy," it isn't exactly the truth, but it is close enough and frequently you get nothing more than "oh" from the young.

You know if you said the baby grows in mother's uterus now you are stuck, because children haven't the slightest idea what the uterus is. The best thing to say is that the baby is inside the mother and he grows until ready to be born.

And when they are ready to come out there is a place between Mommy's legs where he comes through. And let it go at that.

Of course, the other thing is, how do you handle this? Do you stammer? Do you stutter? Are you obviously embar-

rassed? Is this a painful kind of a thing for you to discuss? Children are very, very sensitive, and are far cleverer than we give them credit for. They sense any embarrassment or sensitivity on your part. And they react to it. Now, like everything else, they get conditioned, and they come to you with several questions about sex and about babies, the birth of babies, how babies are made, how they get out, and where they grow. If each time they ask a question and get the same feeling of embarrassment and strangeness from you, then eventually they don't ask you, and if someone asks this question of them, they in turn react the same way. These are learned reactions.

Now, of course, you may very well be embarrassed. Johnny has learned that he has a penis. This is very nice, and penis is a new word too, you see. And you know little kids practice new words on everybody, so in the middle of mother's dinner party, little Johnny turns to the person next to him and says to this gentleman, "Mr. So-and-So, do you have a penis too?" And dead silence reigns at the table. This is very apt to happen.

Then again, a girl comes to the time when menstruation begins, and is just petrified because she has learned that bleeding is abnormal, and unless she realizes that this is perfectly normal for a woman, this can be very frightening. And there are many ways of explaining menstruation, although you don't have to do much about it until you notice that girls are starting to show signs of puberty, like breast development, little bits of hair under the arms—that kind of thing. Maybe you notice a few pubic hairs. Then it is time to take them aside and tell them that there comes a time in every girl's life when she begins once a month,

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ordinarily, to have some bleeding from the vagina, or the opening between their legs, and this is perfectly normal, and all it means is the body is getting ready eventually to have a baby. And then go on from there. Now the other thing is, many parents utilize the books that are available, and there are excellent books and pamphlets for children.

*A doctor, specializing in obstetrics in a large Wisconsin city, comments:*

It's truly hard to imagine the astounding lack of information even adults have about sex and birth. I particularly remember one mother who was having a terrible time of it in the labor and delivery room. She yelled and screamed and carried on, and fussed and fumed, and was just in the worst way, until I finally found out that she actually believed that the baby would be born through her navel, and was just frightened to death. And this girl about to become a mother told me afterwards that this was what she had been told as a youngster by her mother, and she had never thought it necessary to question it. She carried it through to marriage and pregnancy.

Really, these things—basic sex education for children—relate to the sexual adjustment that young couples have when they first marry. Girls are always instilled with the fear of illegitimate births and promiscuity. In many homes they're frightened away from petting and letting boys go to extremes, and what you do and what you don't. Then they marry, and all of a sudden they are supposed to throw off all these taboos, and the normal sex play that goes with preintercourse

is then not only right, but expected of them. Yet, were they ever prepared for their initial nights alone with their new husbands?

Parents have so much to learn before they can adequately teach. For example, boys and girls masturbate. Now that is not a sin, but many parents consider it so. Hands are slapped, put behind their backs, and so naughtiness becomes associated with genital manipulation. Still, it's perfectly normal, and most children outgrow it. The thing here is to distract them, and if they do it at night in the privacy of their beds, then let them.

"It's too stimulating for the kids. . . ."

*Not everyone believes that the parent should try to explain too much. This dissenter teaches sex education to twelve-year-olds in a comfortable, upper-middle-class community near Philadelphia.*

I am a great believer in leaving kids alone. One of the mistakes we've made in parent educational circles is that we have made parents feel that they have to discuss all these things with their kids. And the result is that we've created a good deal of anxiety in parents who haven't discussed sex with their children. Now, let's be honest about this thing. Millions of men and women with normal sex drives and inhibitions received no instruction from anyone but their friends and dirty books.

In fact, I think some parents are sincerely embarrassed when their kids ask them, and they would much prefer a disinterested clergyman, doctor, or teacher to handle the

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entire thing. A youngster going through puberty begins to have sexual stirrings. His parents are the most important people in the world to him, and, naturally, these feelings are expressed toward his folks, and he has to struggle to control them. Or he starts getting into sexual discussions with them which are very stimulating, and it makes it even more difficult. I think that when parents and their children talk about sex, if they get involved in sex discussions, then it becomes more than just to get information. It becomes an experience. And I think that's bad. Bad because it's too stimulating for the kids, and bad because I think it is tying them to the parents in an unhealthy way. A boy should be breaking away from his parents, he should be saying to himself, "Gee, I want to find someone like Mom," not getting all involved in his feelings about Mom so that when he gets older he can't move out. The same thing applies to girls.

Some parents think it very, very sophisticated to tell dirty jokes or use street language at the dinner table and whatnot. I think it nonsense. When kids start talking like that, my father, who was a Methodist minister as well as a superb athlete, would always say to us, "Use that filth with your friends, and save your respect for your family."

And take the parents who go about the house in various stages of undress. Now I think occasionally a kid happens to pop into the bedroom, and I don't think a parent should fly under the bed. But they may have to go out of their way. I know a father, for example, who showered with his two little girls until they were quite old. I think this is very harmful. Very, very harmful. My God, you are just being oblivious of the fact that these kids have sexual feelings,

that they are eternally interested in the paradox of sex, and all such parents do is stimulate sexual feelings.

Anywhere from ten to twelve they begin to get stirred up, but not really in a way that is directed toward members of the opposite sex. But all along the line, their parents should be pretty discreet. They should lock or close their bedroom door at night. They can exhibit affection and warmth around the kids, but it's not a good idea for the husband to go pawing his wife when the kids are around. Very often, fathers are careless about that. Or to just kind of snicker, you know, the way a lot of parents will snicker in ways which—well, the husband will make a sort of off-color kind of crack. It is obvious to the twelve-year-old kids that they are talking about something intimate. That's not good.

When you talk about a physical relationship, you are speaking of the most intimate way two people can relate their feelings to each other. As far as the physical act, you don't have to give kids marriage manuals to tell them what to do in bed. They'll eventually have lots of fun experimenting and finding out for themselves.

The mystique of sex is learned over a long period of time, and these are things that parents give kids by osmosis in a million and one experiences. This is what's important. Parents think that by answering a question about sexual intercourse they make a great difference in the child's adjustment. Hell, sure it is something you should do, and it is something that would help the kid, but it is not of earth-shaking importance.

It is good to tell a kid, but here's where you have to be careful. This gets me back to the explanation that I give in

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the course. Let me develop that a bit more. I say to the kids, "You don't know what you are going to be like when you are older. If I asked you what it is going to be like when you go to college, you can't imagine what it is going to be like, as you are going to be very different from what you are now. Therefore, when I describe the physical relationship in marriage to you, now, it seems difficult to understand, because you don't know what you are going to be like. Oh, you can probably imagine what it's like to have a love relationship with a woman. You've had crushes on girls, you've liked certain girls, but you really can't imagine what it is like to be grown up and be in this relationship. Hence, it must be very difficult for you to understand how people—people who are very close in their feelings and who want to share life's experiences, share themselves physically by mating."

As a matter of fact, it may seem strange and a kooky thing to do, and it is, to preadolescents—at this particular age, because they are not heterosexually oriented. If you listen to their stories, they are all bathroom story jokes, so naturally sex is seen within this content, and it is dirtied up. You see parents get upset when their kids think sex is dirty. The parent doesn't have to create that kind of environment. The kid will do that. He sees this from where he is—in his phase.

Now some kids get very curious, and they want to know how often people have relations. They might ask their mother or father, "How often do you have relations a week?" "What does it feel like?" "How long does it go on?" I wouldn't answer questions like this. Indeed, I wouldn't even get involved with it. For example, with my classes, I always throw it back to them. I say, "How long do you think it takes?" Some kid will say five minutes, another will say five



hours. Then I say: "Well, that depends. It depends on the couples. It is an exciting thing. It is an exciting experience, and it is something that people like."

But if a kid asked a mother or father how often they have relations, I think the answer should be: "Well, this varies with different couples. And this is personal. People don't talk—husbands and wives don't talk about this. This is a part of their relationship that is very private." You can say that without rejecting a child. It's like when he goes into the toilet—it's the same thing.

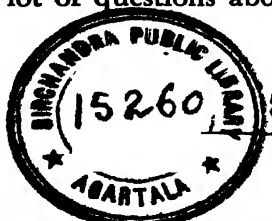
Just as it is when a seventeen-year-old comes home from a date and a mother wants that kid to recite the whole thing, right down to the last detail, so that she can vicariously share in whatever sexual pleasure this kid got, you see, a goodnight kiss, or petting, or whatever. I think this is what I mean by saying that you have to be careful that your discussions of sex with your kids don't go over into this other kind of thing; you have to have a very clear separation here.

Every question posed to a father or mother does not have to be answered. Kids have to learn self-control, too. Now in my classes, twelve-year-olds ask lots of questions that I explain. However, to understand their questions you have to remember where these kids are in their development. Preadolescence is a period when kids are kind of breaking up. It is almost as if the personality says that to grow bigger I have to, like a snake or a crab, shed this outer shell so that I can grow. These kids are very primitive in their behavior. They are sloppy. They don't like to bathe, and their sexual impulses are very primitive—primitive in that they are not heterosexually oriented. When they get past preadolescence, when they get into the young teens—thirteen, fourteen,

fifteen—then it is different. Then they are preoccupied with abnormalities. I think this is part of this whole business. They'll ask endlessly about babies—all the abnormalities of birth, Siamese twins, and the like.

There is another whole area which you have to be sensitive to pick up, and that is their own concern about their growth. Whenever I tell the boys I know how concerned they are about growing into manhood, I point out that this goes on differently with different boys. One boy might get hair under his arms or over his penis first, or his penis might get bigger first, or he might become well muscled first, and whatnot. I say to these kids, "When you are in the shower room I know the first thing you do is look at the hairs over the pubic area to see who has the most hair." And they just laugh.

It is so obvious that you are hitting home with exactly what they are concerned about. I think if any man is honest with himself, and will look back to this period, he said the same thing. "Am I going to be a man?" "Am I going to be whole?" The same thing applies to the girls. A delightful story a girls' teacher told me was that a girl asked, "Are you sure that I am going to have breasts?" And Edith, the teacher, said, "Yes, every girl develops breasts." "Are you absolutely sure?" "Yes." She kept this up, and finally she said, "Mrs. Wilson, could you please put that in writing?" She really wanted it in writing! The degree of anxiety! These girls have tremendous worries. One breast sometimes grows larger than the other during this period. There is great concern about that. They are not terribly interested in mating, but far more preoccupied with their own growth at this period, and there are a lot of questions about social relationships, and



how involved they should be with members of the opposite sex.\*

"... an awfully nice place to learn about it would be from your own family."

*This registered nurse, thirty-three, lives in Newark, New Jersey, and specializes in cases concerning children. She has one daughter, now fifteen.*

You cannot suddenly tell children the facts of life. The right time at the right place with the right information is a wise dictum. For example, children are very different in their ability to understand and use information. But when a youngster begins to menstruate in, say, the sixth grade, she might be told then what menstruation is in preparation for, along with what it is. Some children think it is bleeding from a sudden wound. Here the facts must supplant the mystery. It is simple enough for a mother or female relative to explain menstruation. I say that it is simply the preparation the body makes for putting down a nice warm lining for the egg which is going to be put out of the ovary at its regular time, and it comes along a tube. Then I add that if there had been

\* A male investigator recently wrote about his own experiences teaching sex education to eighth-grade girls, many of whom were twelve years old. He wrote that they were largely torn between confusion and ignorance. Their questions ranged from the morality of petting and why boys were so eager, to what happened on a wedding night, whether coitus was painful, and what to do if someone tried rape. His conclusion was that those youngsters were desperate for specific factual information. See Thomas Poffenberger, "Responses of Eighth Grade Girls to a Talk on Sex," *Marriage and Family Living*, XXII, No. 1,

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any sperm cells that were introduced there by a male, then this would be when it would be fertilized. But when it gets to the uterus, and there isn't any fertilization of the egg, and the lining of the uterus which had been prepared is cast off, this is what causes the bloody discharge, and is known as the menstrual cycle. A simple, effective explanation.

I also think that you need to discuss any questions a girl may have about her breasts feeling full and tingling and so forth; she is undoubtedly interested and concerned about the fact that she is developing breasts because we are so bust-conscious in our culture. Most adolescent girls that I know are very anxious to wear a bra. I would also recommend a book like *The Wonderful Story of How You Were Born or Growing Up*.\*

In any event, it seems to me that sex and birth are part of the family and a part of life, and an awfully nice place to learn about it would be from your own family.

### *An adult reminiscing about his youth:*

How does one learn about sex? Well, this is what happened to me. I was ten, and one summer afternoon—I remember it was a Monday—a kid named Billy came up to me and said he knew where I came from and how I was started. “How?” I challenged him. “Well,” he said, “your father put it into your mother, and that swelled her up.” Bango—I hit

him right in the nose, and it started bleeding. "That'll teach you, you bastard, talking about my mother that way."

Honestly, sex was dirty, clandestine talk. But I was intrigued; I had heard rumors. So I went home that evening for supper, and at the table I asked my parents if it really was as Billy had said. Bang—this one was across my mouth and then another crack up against my cheek. "Close your dirty little mouth," my father roared, "or I'll personally close it for you." It wasn't until I met other, more worldly, ten-year-olds later that summer that Billy's rumor was confirmed.

## *Death*

*Social worker, woman, fifty-two, Connecticut:*

I have never heard a young child say, "What is death?" Adults ask that question. Poets. Philosophers. Children say, "Mother, you're going to die, aren't you?" And the mother tells me this. Of course, she is deeply shocked. Or they'll say, "Why don't they put dead people in the closet instead of under the ground?" Or, "Wouldn't it be swell to live a million million years?" Or, they have caught on that death is "old," so they will look at their grandparents and suddenly embarrass their mother and everybody else by asking them, "Are you going to die soon?" You see, children have their own way of looking at death, or managing their fear of it. You've got to be able to understand, to see it their way, if you want to be any help.

*Overheard during a jump rope game in Great Neck, New York:*

"Doctor, Doctor will I die?  
Yes, my child, and so will I."

"I love him, but I don't know what to say."

*The speaker is a twenty-nine-year-old carpenter, a high school graduate, veteran, the father of a little boy, and recently widowed.*

It was eight months ago today, a rather warmish day in June, when Janice, my wife, took Dickie, our seven-year-old, to the shoe store. Janice was six months pregnant, we were very much in love and were hoping that our next would be a girl. In fact, we had already selected the name—Rachel, after my wife's grandmother.

Well, they were in the store, my mother-in-law was with them, and Janice began to complain of a headache, a very sudden headache, and then she fainted. She was rushed to a hospital, was conscious for ten to fifteen minutes, and then died. It was as sudden as that.

Dickie was right alongside my wife all the time. He knew his mother was ill. He saw the ambulance, the stretcher, the doctors and attendants, and everything.

When Janice died, I was in a state of shock. I cried a lot, but never in front of Dickie. I took long walks, but never with the boy. In fact, for weeks I just couldn't bring myself to discuss his mother with him.

I had gone for advice to our pediatrician, and he told me the best thing to do was to meet the situation realistically and tell Dickie his mother had died, and was not coming back. I tried as best I could, but didn't do a very good job of it.

When I told Dickie, he began crying. But not for long.

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He stopped, and from that point on I believed he sort of understood. But he kept asking my mother-in-law questions. He kept asking, "When is she coming back?" We agreed the answer would always be, "She is not coming back."

Then, some months later, he began to ask where his mother was at that very moment. Now, I'm no genius, but I hate like hell to have to tell Dickie that his mom, the girl I loved, was under the ground, decaying in a grave. So I begged the question. I evaded direct answers. Maybe it's wrong, or maybe I'm right, but let him find out when he's able to handle the information. I'm his father and I can't yet. My religion believes in some sort of heaven, but even that doesn't seem the right answer, now that Janice is dead.

I have no advice to offer anyone. Everybody would have to feel their own way in such a mess as we've lived through. How can experts tell me what to do? Janice was my wife and Dickie's mother. The only thing I did was not to say anything until he asked, and then answer as gently, but briefly, as I could. I try to give him as much attention now as I can. I love him, you know, and so does his grandma, and he feels it. So I hope that will be enough to get him through. Someday, when he's older, and the shock has worn off, we can talk about his wonderful mother and how and maybe why she died.

"At least I should've been allowed to say good-bye."

*A thirty-six-year-old Berkeley, California housewife tells of the effect of the death of her father on her twelve-year-old daughter.*



Gail loved Dad. His arrival at our house was a tremendous event for her. In fact, my husband and I would often kid ourselves that were we suddenly to vanish, she would make the transition pretty easy. After all, she would have her grandpa. I just say all this now because I want to point out how much she loved the man. And then he began to die. Slowly, with too much pain. He started losing weight and strength quickly. My father, who was strong and quick and graceful, began to go. He could barely smile at Gail when we visited. Finally, we agreed to stop coming with her. Believe me, my father seemed to sense that his life was ended with that decision; he once told my husband that the decision hurt him more than his cancer. But we wanted to shield Gail.

She took it very hard. She kept asking us when she could see him. Why didn't he come anymore to our house? Had he stopped loving her? My husband finally broke down. He wanted to take her along one Sunday, but I refused. "Why cause her all that pain?" was my point of view. "Death," I remember saying to him, "isn't for the young." I suppose it was really because I was afraid, afraid that I would break down at such a reunion, afraid that my father and Gail would become terribly upset. The damndest thing about it all was the awful responsibility of making the right decision.

When Dad mercifully died, finally, we sat down with her and told her everything. By then, however, I knew that I had made a mistake. I should not have roped her off from her grandfather. But nothing helped. Gail began having nightmares and blaming us and herself. One day, in the midst of eating breakfast, she blurted out, "You know Grandpa died because I wasn't there to help him. I could've washed his

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face and made him laugh sometimes. At least I should've been allowed to say good-bye."

"Poor Julia, I see you are truly bad sick."

*"I teach the second grade in an industrial Connecticut city," said one teacher, twenty-six, unmarried.*

The kids are pretty much like kids everywhere, I suppose, and some things make them sit up and take notice more than others. Their parents aren't too well off or educated, and they often come in to us here at the school, and ask all sorts of questions about the kids.

I was aware that Tommy wasn't behaving quite his usual way—he's generally wild and messy and overactive, a real boy. Now, surprisingly, he seemed pretty subdued. Still, I gave it little thought. One entire week, however, he was absent, and then late one Friday, when I was collecting my lesson plans for some weekend work, his mother showed up. Tommy, she said, was her older child. I knew that they also had a four-year-old girl. The mother was pretty worn-looking, dark rings around her eyes, a dirty kerchief about her head.

She told me to excuse Tommy for being out, but her girl had just died of leukemia. Then she started crying and crying. Her whole body shook. I guess I was in a bit of shock myself. "But it's not for me or Julia that I'm crying," she said, "it's for my Tommy." She told me that the little girl had been sick for nearly a year, that the disease had gone into a state of remission for a while, had suddenly returned,

and that she and her husband were quite prepared for it, that is, as prepared as parents can be. Her problem now was really Tommy. He wasn't prepared at all, wetting his bed, moping, and generally acting strangely. She wanted advice. She was desperate, she said.

Well, I told her I would think about the problem, and see her on the following Monday, as early as she wanted to meet with me. She hardly heard me, and went on talking. And as she talked, quietly, never once raising her voice, I realized how complicated it all was. You simply cannot prepare a child for an entire year ahead that another child must die, especially when the doomed child is walking around and looks all right.

Everybody knew that Julia was sick. Tommy did too. But he resented the extra-special treatment she continually received. "Why does she get everything?" was one of his more common complaints, his mother told me. She finally stopped then, and I promised to see her again.

On Monday we met before classes, very early, and I asked the mother what it was she had said to Tommy about the death of Julia. And she answered, "I told him that Julia was finished being sick, and had gone to heaven to play with the angels."

So I said, "Did Tommy ever see you and your husband very sad after Julia died?"

"You know," she said, "my husband and I have lived with this for a long time, and we were glad when our Julia's suffering was over." Now this was a very honest and reasonable reaction, but the only trouble was that Tommy hadn't been as prepared as they were.

Even if they had wanted to, they couldn't tell him too

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much, probably for fear of what he might say to Julia. Was there something that could help him now? I thought there was. Two things. First, the mother said that they had told Tommy leukemia was a very special, very rare, very strange illness. And second, she said one day toward the end, before Julia went to the hospital, Tommy did go over to her and rub her back and say, "Poor Julia, I see you are truly bad sick."

Well, those two things seemed to me like a lifesaver. He did have the idea that the sickness was special, an unusual thing. And he saw that though everyone tried to help, even himself, it just didn't do any good.

Later, when Tommy returned to school, I gave him a big hug. And I said that his mummy had told me about Julia, and that I was sorry, and I would be glad to hear about it from him, if he wanted to talk. And he said to me, "Julia died because they couldn't help her a bit." I said then, "Well, that's true, but they really tried, and what more can you do than really try?" And then he said the natural thing for any child to say at such a moment, "When I die I'll take my trains." I could only say to him, "Tommy, Julia's sickness was very special, but there isn't a single thing about you we cannot help." Take a look at yourself. Goodness, I am helping you here in school. And besides, you're not going to die." And he just beamed, and said, "I can even help myself. I help my mommy and daddy. I even helped Julia, and rubbed her back."

Afterwards, after the lunch recess, he came up to me, and hugged me, and told me, "God made Julia into an angel." I said, "That's true, Mommy told me that." Later, that same week, he made a drawing at his table and brought

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it to me. "Julia," he said, "won't see this, but Mommy and Daddy will."

So that was my way. To reassure Tommy, of course, that nothing was going to happen to him. That his problems, whatever they were, could be helped, but that Julia's problem was special and unusual. But more important, to help him face the reality of it. Sooner or later we all have to learn to accept life as it is. You do your best, you try your hardest, but some things are just out of your hands. You know, it's a relief to feel that. Tommy found it a relief. A comfort. Of course, I said all the other nice things. You know, death isn't a punishment. Nothing hurts after you die. Death comes when we are tired and old, except for rare cases like Julia's. Still, I don't know how much that helps. Do the right words make life any easier?

"They need to weep, to wail, to shake their fists at the heavens."

*This forty-one-year-old mother of two boys is a school psychologist in a New York City suburban elementary school.*

I can never appreciate the cotton batting we wrap about our children, and especially around death. Everyone knows that death is inevitable, but we're almost all afraid to face up to it. Naturally, we pass this dread of the mysterious and invisible on to our kids. That's part of what makes it so frightening. And all generations have done the same. Yes,

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in my work, I see that children imagine death to be so much worse than it often is.

I remember one mother who came in for a chat, and told me that she had two children. She was pregnant with the third when it was born prematurely, died, and was cremated immediately. She felt that she simply could not tell her nine-year-old son about this. He wouldn't understand. It was too horrifying and painful, she reasoned. And she didn't say anything at all. When she returned from the hospital, she was terribly distressed herself, but tried to avoid the entire topic. She didn't talk directly with the younger, although she did talk to her elder, twelve. And the younger child became increasingly troubled, had nightmares, was very much afraid of the dark, and wouldn't open his own closet door or dresser drawers. After this had gone on for some time she suddenly confronted him, and asked what in the world was wrong. The child burst into tears and said, "Is the baby in those places?" And then she understood that the fantasy of a very young child about what might have happened was so grotesque, was so much worse than what really happened, that it caused a kind of awakening of the child's imagination. And they did tell him the truth after this. They went to the cemetery where the remains of the infant were, and the child felt much better about it. This is one kind of thing where I think that information is important, because what a child will imagine about it will be so much worse.

Another thing that happens is, that when you exclude a child from the experience of death in the family, you are not helping him find the emotional means to handle it. One mother told me that she had taken her son, when he

was six or seven, to a memorial service for his grandfather. The service was held at a cemetery, and the rest of the family were horrified that a child was there. During the service for her father, this mother began to cry, and she picked up her son and told him that she was thinking of Grandpa, and that when you love someone a good deal and you are thinking about them, you want to cry. Her cousin had left her nine- and twelve-year-olds at home, and when she had returned, her kids had been raising the devil with the baby-sitter. She was short-tempered with them, and ordered them to bed, and they asked nothing about the memorial services. But first one and then the other awoke with nightmares. Finally, she and her husband, at one o'clock in the morning, at their kitchen table, sat down with their children. They cried, and told the children precisely what had happened at the service. And she later said to me, "You know what it was? I was giving myself the right to cry, but I wasn't giving it to them." This is what adults feel about death—that they need to weep, to wail, to shake their fists at the heavens, and say, "This isn't right"—to go through all the emotional stages that give us strength, and allow us to move into the next phase, namely, acceptance. What that woman was doing was overprotecting to the extent of smothering.

"Parents who are afraid to let a child see them weep are making a mistake."

*A psychiatric social worker:*

I remember a woman who was very, very close to her husband, and somewhat excluded her children from her re-

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lationship with him. He died suddenly, at about forty-two, I think, and she was so devastated, she felt that she couldn't let her daughters see her in this state, so she went away for three months. They never saw her cry. She went from the hospital where he died to her sister in Brazil, leaving the children in the country. I remember, when she came back, the children were down at the water, with a lot of other children, and the mother got out of the car and held out her arms to her children, thinking they would rush to her. And they ran for the hills. It took a whole group of men and women several hours to find them. They had just simply run from her. I have never forgotten that feeling, because I guess I understood it at the time, too. If someone hasn't shared their emotion with you, then you can't share with them, and to be excluded from this kind of an experience with another human being makes it very difficult to move into a relationship again.

Parents who are afraid to let a child see them weep are making a mistake in thinking that isn't really comforting to a child. Teaching a child a technique—a human technique—this is what we do when we are sad, this is what we do when we are troubled. This is what we do when we are frightened. This is what we do when we are miserable. It is human, we need it, it is a normal thing to go through, and by doing it yourself and letting your child see you undergo this experience, then you give the child an opportunity to learn how to do it.

Certainly, there are situations when a child will be too young to go to a funeral, for example, would be very fearful of it, and he should not be forced to. There are certain customs and certain religious groups that may seem too bar-



barous for a very young child to witness. But even there, if a child is too young to share something with the whole family, or if a parent feels that other people at a funeral are going to behave in a way that is really overwhelming to a child, maybe a child should not be involved in that experience itself. But with one's own family, with the mother or the father, or whoever is left—they should be able to sit down together or talk together about what happened and say, "This is a time when Mommie is going to be crying a lot," or, "This is a time when Daddy is going to be wanting to be by himself. It is hard for men to cry sometimes, but Daddy may be sitting off by himself and thinking about his mother." The idea is to try to communicate, to try to reflect emotion so that a child doesn't feel excluded from it.

There is another dimension too, in not excluding a child, and that is the business of a child's peculiar way of over-identifying his own role in a death, personalizing it, perhaps feeling that *he* is responsible for it in some way. I have heard stories over and over again, from mothers in the groups that I have met with, about a child who will behave in very disturbed ways after the death of someone, and the disturbance continues until there is some explanation of the fact that the child is not responsible for the death. For example, a parent once told me that a grandparent had lived with them, and was ill for a couple of years. Their young child was told to be quiet and not make too much noise because Grandma was sick, and she couldn't stand the noise, and so forth. When the grandparent ultimately died, the child was excluded from the grieving, the mourning, the ceremonials and so forth. Later, he developed very severe fears and nightmares and anxieties, until the parents were able to say

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to him: "Look, you were a child. You behaved exactly like a child. Grandma would have died even if you had been screaming all the time. It had nothing to do with the noise you made. It didn't even have anything to do with the fact that sometimes you wished Grandma would die." The point I'm trying to make is that the boy's reactions were normal. In any intense human relationship we hate people sometimes as much as we love them. There are times when they get on our nerves, and we would be happy without them. The feeling that you sometimes didn't love somebody had nothing to do with their death, even though a child's instinctual, primitive reaction may be, "I thought a bad thought about them, and that's what did it."

We see this constantly in young children. I remember a child who got a sled for Christmas, and who stood at the window looking at the sky and saying, "Snow, snow, snow," over and over again, as if the magical word would make it happen. That is a kind of primitive human instinct, which many of us never get over, that the word can be the thing, that the word can make something happen. You know, we knock on wood because we are afraid of what our words might do. I met a friend of mine who was telling me her husband was considered for a new job, and she said, "I don't want to say anything about it, because if I do, maybe he won't get it." Now this is magical thinking, and children do it all the time. I remember yet another situation, in which a mother told me of her infant that had died, and her older child, about five, was absolutely panic-stricken. The dead child was about six months old, and the older one in kindergarten. This is where I knew him. I was teaching at the time, and he would hide under the tables and under the furniture,

and behave in a way that he had never behaved before. Finally, I said to him: "Mark, you didn't kill that baby. You had nothing to do with it." I explained to that terrified little boy that the baby had had something wrong with its lung, and that it had choked, and so forth. And the relief in this child's expression—he didn't do it because he had been mad there was a new baby in the house, and had probably wished it hadn't come, and his wish had not gotten rid of it. This kind of fantasy, this kind of primitive thinking, is common to all children.

"I can't get it out of my mind."

*"I was seven or eight and my sister ten years older, when she was killed in an accident." The speaker is a forty-year-old policeman in upper New York State.*

I have never been able to get over the memory of that horrible wake. Here was my poor widowed mother, with five kids, and her eldest dead—the one she most depended on for taking care of the younger kids and cooking each day while she was at work. I can't get it out of my mind. We were all sitting around, and I was plain scared at seeing my sister all laid out in the box, and suddenly I shouted out to no one in particular, "But who's going to cook and clean for me?" I didn't mean it that way exactly, but out it came. My Uncle Teddy was sitting alongside of me, I remember, and he reached out and smacked me so hard across the face that I fell out of my seat. I remember beginning to cry, and he started to smack me again. And my mother stopped

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him. She said, "Teddy, don't, he's only a child. Let him be." And I just can't forget that. All I wanted to really say was how sorry and scared I was. Only Ma understood.

"I believe in giving them facts, however cold-blooded it may sound."

*This child psychologist and parent is often asked for advice. He is fifty-six, Canadian-born, a grandfather, and lives in a major Midwestern city.*

Parents tell me the questions their kids ask. "If I'm bad, will I die?" "What is death?" "Where is he?" "Is he sleeping?" "Will I ever see Willie again?"

First of all, I generally suggest that with primary school kids, one should be very down to earth about what happens in death. It is not like sleeping. I think this one of childhood's paramount fears, because we talk of death as a kind of a sleep. It is *not* being asleep. The heart stops beating, the blood stops circulating. The organs don't function, and the body is dead. Nothing is working anymore inside the body. And this happens when you get very, very old, and the body is very, very tired, and can't work anymore. Beyond that, depending upon your religious beliefs, of course, you may or may not talk of souls and an afterlife and the rest. If one doesn't have any such religious feelings, then perhaps it may be best to say very directly something like, "We don't understand all the mysteries of life, but one thing is certain, that is that we will never forget him." And talk at great length about, "Do you remember when he took us to the

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park?" or, "When I was a small boy he was my daddy and he took me to my first baseball game," and so forth. And stress that the dead is still with you, a part of you, his grandchildren, his nieces, cousins, and the like.

When children ask if they will ever see the dead again, I prefer to say no, again, if there are no religious scruples. For those who do not honestly believe in some form of other world it is devastating to lie about this, because the young know it doesn't happen and so do you. I believe, in short, of giving them the facts, however cold-blooded it may sound, from the cremation to the burial, whatever they ask you.

"I followed my instincts."

*"It was about three in the morning, a Tuesday. We had been out to a movie and then we watched a late show on television. I was with him when it happened. It was all a question of minutes. Ken began to choke, to gasp for breath. He turned color, and collapsed. I called the police; they tried oxygen, everything, but it was no use." The speaker, thirty-three, is the mother of two boys, five and eight, and a widow for two years.*

Ken's death was so overwhelming that had I let it sink in right then I think I would have just collapsed, but I had to think of the important things and how to tell the boys. When his body was still in the house that morning, I told them Daddy was sick and had to sleep, and shipped

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them out to friends. Ken was buried on Wednesday afternoon, and I told them the following evening.

My friends suggested that I speak to a psychiatrist, but he wasn't helpful. He was very pedantic, and I resented his manner. He went down his list, and any time I'd interrupt with a question he glossed over it as though it wasn't terribly important. Now I don't think it hurts to seek help, but he was no help. So I followed my instincts.

I told the boys that sometimes people die—it had happened to Daddy—and that nothing could have saved him. My father had died three months earlier, and they knew something about death, that people, animals, and flowers faded and died. I tried to tell them that even though Daddy was no longer with us, he had left us with many things. I really don't know how much of that got through to Hal, my six-year-old.

We all started crying—I remember it vividly—and the six-year-old stopped suddenly, and asked, "When are we getting a new daddy?" Then Mike, my eight-year-old, started questioning in detail—the time, the place, and how it happened. He wanted to know if Ken was lying on his back, his right side, his left side, or his stomach. He wanted to know which way he was facing. He wanted to know how many doctors were in attendance and what instruments they used. His initial question was, "Was it a heart attack?" And I said that we were not sure. And the reason I didn't say "Yes," you know, which is the easiest thing, was because I was afraid he, who's extremely bright and extremely logical, would say to himself: "My grandfather died of a heart attack, my father died of a heart attack. I don't want to be a man." As a matter of fact, he was imagining himself in Ken's place.

A month or so later, he said he never wanted to be a daddy. And I asked, "Why?" and he said, "Because daddies die." This was the thing I was afraid of. So I said, "Well, nobody can be too sure," and Mike's answer was, "If it wasn't a heart attack, it was something with the brain." He went on: "Because if the brain stops, then everything stops. And if the heart stops, then everything stops." So this was his analysis. And then he was angry with me. He was angry with me because, he said, "Since the doctors didn't know what was wrong, and you didn't know what was wrong, why didn't they cut him up?"

Nearly two years later, my children accept Ken's death, and at the same time, paradoxically, they don't accept it. They feel different, especially with other children. I think they've changed. They feel unusual. I think they even feel guilty, which is something that I try to alleviate in some way. They resent some of the men I've dated, who have called for me here at the house, because, I think, the men are alive and their father isn't. I sometimes think my seven-year-old, who was five at the time, still is hoping that his father will miraculously return. Finality means nothing to a child. He once came to me, about six months ago, and suddenly and quietly asked me if Daddy was under the ground in a box. I said yes, that all the dead were under the ground in a special box which was like a house for dead people. But I don't know. His questions haunt me. I'm afraid for the child. Still, I never give them more than they ask, I never try to lay it on.

When the youngest asks for a new daddy, I say that he had a daddy, and that some day he may have another daddy, but that right now we just have to do things together, that

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we can't find new daddies just like that. On another occasion, I reached for some apples from our tree, but they were too high up. And Hal said that when he got a new father, the apples would be reached.

I haven't much sure advice for anyone. I think everybody is unique, and their situations different. Age, religion, maturity, all have something to do with it. But you can't run away from it. My children are still very much afraid to leave me. They won't visit other people without me. It's obvious that they are afraid I might die in their absence, and leave them stranded. But it's not as bad as it was, and I don't think any relaxation on their part is directly owing to what I may or may not have actually told them. Hal is still anxious, but less so. Once I developed influenza, and went to bed. Hal came up to my room, and told me he would like to be a mommy. "Why?" I said. "Boys become daddies when they grow up." And his answer was, "Well, daddies die." And I said, "Not all daddies." And he smiled and kissed me.



## *Teaching Religious and Ethical Values*

"We are in danger," said a television lawyer in a television courtroom, "of seeing our values engulfed by the sordid practices of the marketplace." A common enough thought—even trite—except that it has now become a popular parlor game to bemoan the decline of our moral, spiritual, and ethical values. Perhaps it is the lack of a good working definition of "values" that has led many parents to transmit to their children only what they think values are, most often an ambiguous distinction between right and wrong. Then there are those who are concerned with specific indoctrination of their young. If this chapter is any guide, then teaching moral and spiritual values, showing a child an ethical, honest approach to life is a tortuously slow process. Yet it is the most important teaching a parent can offer his child, and surely the most personal. It has to be lived through all the years of childhood. And one should never be afraid to indoctrinate his children with the values he believes essential, and then, one day, give his children the right to test their validity in a world of shifting standards and changing ideals.

'... God has His own ways.'

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*The speaker is a forty-year-old Mormon who has firm religious beliefs. He has a BS from Brigham Young University, and owns a large retail store in Colorado.*

When Kathy and I were married, we naturally planned on a big family. We both came from large families, and we loved the warmth and security that went with it. Our people came west on the great trek in the nineteenth century, and Kathy's great-great-grandfather, in fact, was one of the leaders who had come to Utah with Brigham Young.

Well, after we married, we moved to Denver, and within a year she was pregnant. Our first child, Helen, was a Mongoloid. We took a chance on the second, and Greta was perfectly normal. When we decided on conceiving the third, we never dreamed that Eddie would also be a Mongoloid. It's almost statistically impossible, but it happened.

We could have given Eddie and Helen away to a school. Their life-span is so short, their capacities so limited; the heartaches and agony of it all, the pity of it really, made us want to cry everytime we looked at them.

As Greta, our normal child, grew up, she began to ask more and more about her sister and brother. We explained to her what we sincerely, devoutly, truly believe. That God has His own ways; that each of us will rise up to heaven after death; and that one day we shall all be together again in His heaven. We believe that the love and goodness we give to them here allows them to enter heaven as normal and beautiful. And like us, Greta, now twelve, believed, and believes. And this sustains us, for we really know that Eddie and Helen, our beloved little babies, are beautiful in

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the eyes of the Lord, and are waiting for Kathy and Greta and me.

“What is God?”

*A rabbi puts his faith in a different way. Fifty-two, he has an Orthodox congregation in a very large northeastern city.*

Tragedy and insurmountable problems are unique to the average youngster: after all, their lives are somewhat egocentric and concerned with their immediate senses—that is, until early adolescence. More important to us is how we develop or try to develop their moral character and religious out'oo'. as orthodox Jewish children.

In our schools and in our homes, we stress the necessity of their becoming involved in religious ritual as early as possible, even before they can talk. They see their family Seder at Passover, the Sabbath services, and as soon as they can talk, they will react. They will ask, “Why do you light the candles on Friday evening?” “Why do we wear skull-caps?”

One of the first questions will always be, “What is God?” The younger the child, the more vivid God is for him. We teach a child to pray to God in the form of small blessings.

I remember one incident in our school where a good friend of mine had been teaching the youngsters in grades one and two. He asked the children, “What do you think God is?” And I remember the boy's name, Robert. He said

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(he was six years old), "God is a great force that revolves around the earth." Now he had picked up these concepts, and he was a precocious boy. But what he really knew was that God made everything. He made this earth. He made the world, and He is a great force. A child may not understand "force," but we tell him God is not like you and me. He is some great big majestic force. Really, our whole basis of teaching God to children is, you see, indirect. We teach them about the Bible. We tell them stories. In this way they understand what God is, even on the lower levels. We teach the Bible in our schools at a very young age, and we tell them the creation story on their level when they are six or seven. We teach them to say blessings. We say a blessing in Hebrew so they understand and get a concept of what God is. I feel that this grows with them. If we would ask an adult, "What is God?" he can't explain. To assert that you could prove the existence of God is arrogance. To deny Him is folly. To love Him is to serve Him. That is pretty much what we teach our children.

*Another rabbi speaks of his family and his Illinois congregation.*

When my own children were young, my wife and I never imposed our values and beliefs on them. We have four children, two boys and two girls, and we tried to live our lives honestly and truthfully, and thereby hoped to inspire them. You can't tell a child something that you yourself don't believe. It is trite to speak of the Sabbath worshiper who closes his amoral deals during the week, and turns up

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in church or synagogue every weekend. But the children do know far more than the adults give them credit for. And that seems to me to be the central problem, really. Many people today have tended to ignore religion. I mean, how can you really rationalize or explain, say, death, to a child or to yourself unless you believe in a hereafter? Otherwise, it seems too final, too abrupt. Its finality overwhelms you, yet belief in another existence dissipates some of the shock of such a swift and permanent end for those we love. We Orthodox Jews accept death. Each man's span of years was preordained by God.

In our congregation, we have many families where one parent is religious, the other indifferent. Therein is the problem. We teach religion in our school, and the child goes home, and frequently there is no religion there. What I try to do is what most clergymen of all faiths must do—inspire the parents. Sometimes it works. One of our people, a school-teacher, told me his nine-year-old daughter went to our school because her best friend attended. After several weeks, the little girl, Beth, came home and told him that she wasn't planning to eat at home any longer since the home wasn't kosher. He and his wife started buying kosher food because he didn't want to upset the child. A rather silly reason for so intelligent and sensitive a man and woman, but the amusing part is that four years have passed, they are still kosher, and quite content.

Once one of our pupils, a ten-year-old, suddenly blurted out to his teacher that God didn't exist, that blessings and prayers were a waste of time, and that nothing like that could affect his life. Fortunately, our teacher, who was also a mother, calmly told the boy that he was not ready to make

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those assertions; that after he attended schools and lived a while, then the decision would be his. Some parents are deeply upset by this sort of juvenile rejection and rebellion. One family I know nearly turned against their twelve-year-old because of it. Another family developed massive guilt complexes, thinking rejection was their fault, and equating rebellion with mature rejection. Many a time the child is only sowing his wild oats, and, with a little love, understanding, guidance, friendship and conversation, will find his way to a rich, religious life.

“How can we bring our kids up to believe in something that no longer makes any sense to us?”

*“I am a Catholic, my husband an Episcopalian. My daughters are being raised as Catholics. My mother was Jewish, my father Catholic. We are truly an intermarried family.” The speaker is a thirty-year-old editor, married to an engineer, living in a large western city.*

When my daughter came to me at about the age of six, and said, “What religion are we?” I said that we were Catholics, but that Daddy was an Episcopalian. But the fact that we were different did not mean that we could not love each other.

It's not a very satisfactory answer, I know. One couple we know—he's Jewish and she's Methodist—have a pat reply for their kids when the question arises: they aren't anything, but the children can decide on their own faith when they're old enough. Alex, my husband, and I are deeply

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concerned with the feeling that a kid has to have some roots, something to hold on to. To tell them that one day in the nebulous future, a momentous decision will be made—and so far as a kid is concerned it might just as well be irrevocable—is rather fantastic.

I have my own experiences to draw on, and they weren't too satisfactory. My mother is Jewish, Dad a Catholic, and I was baptized Catholic.

I don't recall ever being told that my mother was Jewish, but I remember quite clearly that a girl friend told me that Mother was a Jew. At that time I had been going to religious instruction for a while, and I thought this fact the worst thing in the world, even worse than some plague in the family.

When I heard the news, I was ten or so, I ran down to my father's store—a butcher shop—and called out in front of everyone there, "Is Mommy Jewish?" My father must have been stunned, because he rushed me into the rear, and after smacking my behind "for being so loud and fresh," he quieted down, and explained in his apologetic, always embarrassed way.

He told me that Mother was indeed Jewish. After that we merely acknowledged it as an inescapable fact of life. But any mention of it was always accompanied by the inevitable questions and remarks.

"Do you tell people that your mother is Jewish?" and "You don't have to tell people your mother is Jewish." At the same time that Dad would preach that all religions are the same, that it doesn't matter what religion you are, there was always a hush-hush attitude, as though we were to keep my mother in the closet or something. And I can recall that

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on the Jewish holidays when Jews burn candles for the dead, when I had Christian friends come in, candles were always put in the closet. My mother was working, so she never knew. Of course, there was a great amount of guilt involved in doing something like that.

I think it was more that I was ashamed to tell anyone because I felt that there was something wrong about being Jewish. Because, first of all, I hadn't been told, and it also seemed to be verified by the fact that so many people were prejudiced against Jewish people. It was a German neighborhood. And of course I thought it was too bad that my mother couldn't go to heaven. Only Catholics go to heaven, we were told. There were many conflicts like that involved.

All I can remember is being stunned at finding out suddenly. Why they kept it from me for so long, I'll never know. And that alone made me feel that it was something I had to keep more or less secret, and to this day I tell hardly anyone that Mother is a Jew.

So you can see what all this means to me. Now that our eldest is ten, Alex and I have been telling her—only when she asks, however—that there is only one God, and people worship Him in different ways. Grandmother, my mother, is Jewish, we tell her, while Alex's mother is Episcopalian. Jennie, our daughter, is Catholic, although we are seriously thinking of converting to Alex's religion because I no longer approve of different religions in one family. But through it all we believe that if the children are told in the right way, they may have a very liberal attitude toward the whole thing. If we do convert, I shall simply tell her that we have found a better way, and I think she'll appreciate religion for what it really is.



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My parents, whom I love dearly now, made a lot of mistakes. But who can blame them? They married against their families' wills, and they settled in a place where they were treated as pariahs. Even now, blessed as I am with a college degree, a wonderful husband, a terrifically creative and stimulating job, and two magnificent kids, I cannot think up absolute answers to these problems. Who knows what my daughters may one day feel against me? I still remember, though with much shame and regret at my actions and thoughts, my first Holy Communion, which is a very big celebration in a Catholic girl's life. I felt that Mom was out of place when she came into the church, that she didn't belong there like the others, and I was ashamed of her. I actually felt angry, too, that she wasn't one of us.

Now I look more objectively at organized religion, and I realize that no religion has the right to be dogmatic enough to want to make a child reject a parent. There are many things I no longer believe in, and I ask myself, as does Alex, how we can bring our kids up to believe something that no longer makes any sense to us? What we want our kids to know is our own sense of worth, that we just don't know for sure, that we shall all try to live as good and decent a life as humanly possible without hurting anyone else, and let it go at that.

"I'm so mixed up about it myself."

*"My mother and father were a mixed marriage." This is a thirty-year-old mother of two.*

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My mother was a Roman Catholic, my father a Russian Jew. My mother converted my father, but until she did, I was mixed up—and that is a true statement.

While we were Jewish, we lived in a very gentile neighborhood, and I was always made to feel different, especially by my playmates, so-called. My brother and I stayed home from school on Jewish holidays, and on Sundays I was secretly whisked away to church by my mother's aunt and with my mother's approval. At the same time I was attending Jewish religious school. It was all very confusing. My father never knew what mother was doing. He thought we, the kids, were being raised as Jews. When Mother persuaded Father to become a convert, I gave up trying to understand them. By then I was eighteen, my brother twenty-two, and both of us were pretty independent.

I was married five years later to a man I believed to be at best indifferent to religion and, at worst, an atheist. He had been born a Catholic, but had changed so that he insisted that we marry in a Community Church. I hardly cared. And when Paul, our son, was born, we had him baptized in the same church.

As things worked out poorly, we were divorced, and our divorce papers noted that inasmuch as he was an atheist and I a nondescript Jew, Paul would be reared as a Protestant. That was three years ago. Since then my ex-husband has married a very pious Catholic girl. He has changed. He attends masses, confession, even put a religious idol in his car and wears a Christopher medal around his neck; so here he is, a returned, so to say, Catholic again. Meanwhile, I am as confused as ever. I'm dating a Jewish man, and intend

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to marry him. I feel more Jewish than anything else, but that feeling is pretty lukewarm.

The real trouble, insofar as I'm concerned, is my ex-husband's relationship with Paul. I had the court's determination on religious upbringing waived, and Paul is being reared, instead, as a Jew. Yet when he visits his father he gets pictures of Christ from him. I tell Paul he is Jewish. Harold, my former husband, tells him he can be a Catholic. He tells the boy that he is Jewish because he is young and living with me, but when he gets older he can make a decision.

One day, not long ago, Paul came home with another picture of Christ. He couldn't wait to get into the house to show me this. And I just said, "Well that is very nice." And he went on, "This is God, Mommie." I said, "No, it isn't God. To your father it is God, but to us his name is Jesus Christ, and he was just another man, if he ever lived at all." And Paul said, "No, my father told me that this is God. Jesus Christ is God." His father also gives him religious medals, and the boy has said at times that he will be a Catholic when he gets older. My only response is that when he is older he can make up his mind, but right now he is Jewish.

I explained religion this way to him. I told him that at one time everybody was Jewish in this world. Everybody was Jewish, and then this man, Jesus Christ, came along, and some Jewish people didn't believe what he was saying. Those who didn't believe remained Jewish, and those who did believe in Jesus Christ became Christian. His father is one of those people who believe in Jesus Christ. And we still

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believe in Judaism. Mind you, I only injected my own feelings when Paul came to me, because I had these same feelings as a child of a mixed marriage. I remember thinking that Catholicism was so much more glamorous than Judaism. There seemed a lot more to my mother's elaborate church and ceremonies than to my father's simple, unadorned *shul*. I was victimized by a polite tug of war as a child. Now that nightmare has returned, and Paul is the victim. When he tells me that one day he will become a Catholic, I am reliving my own growing-up years. I'm so mixed up about it myself. The whole thing is utterly confusing.

"We want our kids to accept others as they are . . . not by labels."

*A New Jersey man, an accountant, father of six:*

I don't believe, as many parents do, that not giving kids a religion or not allowing them to go to church has to be damaging. Too many people don't believe, but because they think it good for the kids, tell them that God is in His heaven and all is well. Thus, when a child asks the big questions, they offer the stock answers. That may be all right when a kid is ten or younger, but as they grow the platitudes no longer suffice, and then what? If you sincerely believe, okay; if not, tell them, and let them find their own ways in a tough, but not impossible world. I just cannot approve of nor allow my own kids to be raised in a hypocritical atmosphere.

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I do believe that death is the end-all, and have no profound sense of awe in the church of my fathers. I shall always remember my twelve-year-old cousin, hardly into puberty, so filled with that fire-and-brimstone hullabaloo that he was fearful of walking around with mortal sin on his soul. His mother never attended church, and his father was far too distracted to notice what was happening to the poor kid. And all the time the boy was thinking that they were in sin, and that if they died the next day they would go to hell.

When my nine-year-old asks us about Christ, we say, "Well we don't know that He is God—He may well be." My wife and I think this explanation is the right one for our children. We usually add that some people think Christ was a God, and some that He was a great teacher. In any event, it's important for our children to know what He thought and to know the story of His life because it was a good, a wonderful life. And when our local paper once ran a series on the birth of Christ at Christmastime, we used that as a catalyst for what you might call our "religious time." That technique was especially good with our nine-year-old, who is shy, more mechanical than intellectual in his curiosity, and doesn't initiate questions as easily or spontaneously about abstractions as do our others.

My brother-in-law is an avowed, almost militant atheist. Okay. That's his choice. He had some pretty bad experiences as a kid, or so he says. But his wife, who's much more compassionate and sensitive than he, checks his tendency to go to extremes. Like some religious fanatics who never let up on their kids, so would he if his wife hadn't in-

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sisted that their only child not be forbidden to hear church music, Gregorian chants, and so on. In other words. I don't think that extreme views imposed on children take very deeply, or too often. Whatever it is, whatever answers you bring to your young, you have to be able to live up to what you preach without demanding that the kids take up the same beliefs. The woods are full of ministers' sons who don't believe and atheists' sons who do. Fortunately, kids grow up, leave home, and occasionally make up their own minds.

Finally, my wife and I believe that when kids ask, as ours do from time to time, about Jews or nuns or things like, "Is our God better than Johnny's?" we don't try to create trouble. We want our kids to accept others as they are, individually and not by labels. Jews are people, we always say and are as good and as bad as our own friends and relatives. Nuns dedicate themselves to the poor and sick and helpless rather than being obsessed with their own satisfactions. Some are saints, some are vain, and some are neither. It hasn't anything to do with labels.

"Religion is something that goes very deep . . ."

*"I would never allow any child of mine freedom of religious persuasion, the right to 'pick and choose' as it were. And not because my husband and I are religious—far, far from it. However, religion is something that goes deep into the culture and personality of the individual." This is a thirty-eight-year-old editor of fashion publications. She has twins, eight years old, both boys.*

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Most religious leaders agree that a religion is something that has to be taught at an early period, even before the age of seven. Jesuits used to say, "Leave a child with us until he is seven, and from that point on we don't have to worry." That was the truth, like a lot of other things they thought about children. But basically religion is part of a whole culture of personality, and this is something that begins at a very early age. If you just figure religion as a sort of comparative thing, and take it to a sort of religious supermarket and say: "Here are various things of different types. Make your choice," I think all you'd do is end up there with a very confused individual, and in some cases a neurotic individual, a psychotic individual, who doesn't really know how to choose, and can't really compare these various things. He has no standards of judgment, and the net result is not a more tolerant personality but sometimes a very intolerant personality, someone who thinks: "All religion is bad. Throw it out the window."

"Whatever you believe in, you should uphold strongly."

*A New York City primary school teacher:*

Whatever you believe in, you should uphold strongly. I know I do. But I do so with my classes within the framework of admitting the right to think otherwise. Indeed, "honest differences among honest men" should be a guideline for all parents. I'm a pious Roman Catholic, but that does not mean that I have no backbone. When my pupils'

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parents ask me if their youngsters should celebrate Hanukkah or Christmas, I stare coldly at them, and say: "That's something for you to decide. I know the answer with my own children." How can I tell them that I feel compassion for them because they have no values, no profound beliefs to pass on to their children? I often tell them that when you have to answer a child's questions about religion or morality or anything, for that matter, you are in a very responsible position.

"How can I show the kids the right road to take at all times?"

*A professor of English literature at a well-known women's college, widowed, with two sons, aged eight and twelve:*

The one thing that worried Fred most, before he died three years ago, was how his sons would turn out. We had no religion to speak of, both our parents were dead, and in his last months, when he knew it was but a matter of time, we often spoke quietly of the boys. We decided that I would offer them no fake religiosity or things we never believed in at all; rather, I would do the best I could with as high a moral standard as my Fred had himself.

And, who knows, I think it's working, but ever so slowly. I mean, how can I show the kids the right road to take at all times? How would I know? And if I did know, would my marking out their trails serve to make them adults one day?



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**"The home is the basic thing."**

*This speaker is a humanist, a strong believer in stressing the ethical nature of man. He is a teacher and a writer.*

The home is the basic thing, if the home is a home. That is, it is the source of security, support, nourishment, stimulation, forgiveness, comfort, encouragement, and love. It is where a child learns first the whole business of relating himself as a person to another human being. It is also where he learns a taste for things—sensitive things, beautiful things. He may learn what is ugly too. But I think his basic values are pretty much set by those early relations, first with the parents and then the siblings. The school, I think, would come next.

If the home is inadequate, some of the experiences in the school might take over, might become the important thing in shaping relationships. This is one of the curious things I don't understand. If a girl comes from a dirty home, she may at a certain stage say to herself, "When I get married my home isn't going to be like that." That is, she will react to the dirt, the confusion, the conflict or the disorganization—the mess—and go the other way. Or she may also be conditioned to the idea that "this is the way to live," and never know any better. I think you can't entirely predict what a child will ultimately accept.

For the most part, we would assume that the more a home has of stability, security, justice and love in it, and good taste and good values, the more the child will be conditioned that way. That is the way to live. That is the way to be. And if a home were more or less neutral, I suppose a school

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could make a difference. If it is a good home in terms of these values, then the children coming from it would bring more desire for that from the school. And they would get more out of the school. If the home is insecure, and there are conflicts, false values—money, money, money, all the time, or clothes or show, then this would cancel out whatever the school might undertake to do in developing a sense of values.

The church, it seems to me, comes last, partly because it has so much less contact in time, and the relationship is so much more superficial. When children have contact with the church, the meaning of the impact varies from child to child, depending on the kind of spiritual affinity each child really feels there. If all the child absorbs is creed or prayers or hymns or rituals—though some children, out of their own insecurity, might find some security and meaning in that—it would really be a prop rather than a nourishment. If the church is a continuation of the ethical influence of home and school, and helps to give a larger framework, however, a larger perspective to life, then it could be a great help. If the relationships there are genuinely friendly and loving and compassionate, and people there get a feeling of sincerity about the ideals that they profess, then fine. The point at which the church is most likely to fail is in emphasizing worship instead of relationships and responsibility here and now, or in making a child merely penitent instead of independent—in other words, overstressing that man is sinful and weak and helpless. That is an evil thing to do to children, and from a mental health point of view, very bad. And it is bad moral teaching. But I also think the church must give a child a sense that it does not accept

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the world, but, at the same time, it doesn't run away from the world, and make false promises. It works in the world, through the world, and is not merely critical of the world's injustices and wrongs but serves as a creative link to moral betterment. I think a child can stand almost anything if he has that kind of base.

*From The Child's World by Phyllis Hostler:*

"However deep and sincere our views, we may justly hesitate before imparting them dogmatically. . . . To pass on to our children the sincerity of our convictions, and to show them why we have come to believe thus, and why we hold this belief dearer than any other, is one thing. To give him to understand it cancels out every other, and that any retraction from it on his part would be unforgivable, this is quite another matter. . . . We must do more than give our children the stark unreality of a black-and-white world, the friends who are all right for him to play with and the friends who are 'all wrong.' . . . If we bind over their eyes the blinkers we have been accustomed to wear, they will never see the bright sparkle or the strange hues on each side of the road. We have robbed them of their due."

"What is God?"

*One kind of answer is given here by a practicing child psychologist.*

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At five a child requires a simple, direct answer, with little embroidery—at six, a little more, and at seven, quite a bit. At seven he wants to know “why?” If parents don’t know the answers then, it is up to them to find out, but if it is an ethical question like, “Is there a God?” or “What is God?” and the parent isn’t even sure about that, then I think it is up to him to say a general thing like, “People all over the world think that there is a God,” which is about as honest as you can be.

But if a parent has a firm belief, he can say then—and this is a good time to start—“We believe,” or “In our family we believe. . . .” Of course, I think this is much better. If you have a strong religious belief, you are much luckier than if you don’t, because you can say to the child, “In our family we believe thus and so,” and begin to develop in him a concept of some kind of ethics.

Everyone, I hope, believes in something. If there is no well-defined faith in religion, then one’s personal values have to be transmitted to the young by actually living those values. If you want honesty, for example, you can’t gloat at the dining table how shrewd a deal you put over on some other businessman. If you want your children to develop some sense of social consciousness and idealism, you simply cannot live a life of uninhibited buying and accumulating of material goods.

“He sees his parents believing in it.”

*“I know a fine family with a very high example of good, democratic living, where everybody gets a chance to vote*

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*at the table. There, in that family, the children work out their own problems."* This is the report of a New York City artist, thirty-six, father of two daughters.

*"The mother is a wonderful person who has done much in the way of encouraging her children to be creative, to think for themselves, to discover for themselves, and to draw their own conclusions as much as possible. To me, this is my idea of a fine family.*

*"Actually, despite the fact that both parents are writers and painters, what allowed them to pass these fine qualities to their youngsters was their sureness in what they believed. They believed in their ideals strongly and firmly enough to want to pass them on."*

I once asked the mother something of this type: "Granted a parent wants to encourage his child's questioning and curiosity. Granted a parent approves of such abstract characteristics as creativity and freedom. How are they imparted to children?" Her answer was that she started very early in their lives. Freedom, she said, comes in their own ideas and their own creative times. When they have their play-times, you permit anything, even mud play, although you don't permit them to get the house dirty. That's another set rule, she said. One has to offer them places where they can be free, and where they can do just about anything. They can explore. They can experiment. They can find out. Freedom comes in language, where they are allowed to say funny things. They say crazy words, and you laugh with them, and you enjoy it with them, and this is the kind of developing language art that is so important in communication.

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In freedom, if you want to call it that, anything goes, even dirty words like "doody head." When you get to the point where you hear it all the time, you say, "Look, I'm sick of it. I've had enough toilet talk for one day. I don't want to hear that any more. You have other words that you can use."

But there should be a period when they can just explode, and you enjoy it with them. Laugh with them because it is a wonderful thing to see a child explode with vitality—with so many bouncy things that he does with his body, his voice, and his ideas. He explodes with ideas, too. He has all kinds of fantasies.

Parents can impose their own values, and right away. It has to be the kind of thing that they know themselves, and believe in. I think the problem of values is one of the foremost today in our culture, and I see very few good values any more in families. I could pick out families that have good values, and these are only a few out of the crowd, because we are a materialistic society, because we believe in status as applied to money and position.

Even now, God help us, we are making so much of a fetish of brilliant children with high IQ's that it is a new kind of status symbol. You know, "My Billy is only five, and already he is reading."

The point is that somehow the child always reflects his parents' values. He doesn't need to be told, "Now, Johnny, we believe in this." He sees his parents believing in it. It is the way they behave, a very subtle quality.

Preaching the old adage "do unto others" regularly to the young is too often only lip service. If a parent says, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," and then turns around and pours venom and hate on some

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neighbor, the child eventually realizes that it never was a true value. Parents who do such things, and they are legion, hope their child will accept that moral concept, but they don't believe or want it for themselves. This confuses the kids. They are still children along the way of growing up. But then, many parents haven't grown up either.

"I want this more than anything else for my kids—that they learn to question."

*A physicist teaching at a major northeastern university; he has two daughters and two sons:*

I bought Alex, my eldest, a book the other day, but it was too advanced for the others. So I said to them, "I wonder where the butterflies went? Where did the birds go? And what happened to the bear? And the leaves? And the snow?" There are many subjects that I deal with, because I want this more than anything else for my kids—that they learn to question.

I come home from a convention, and I sit them all down, and tell them about my trip, not as I would tell an adult, but in an entirely different manner. For instance, I start at seven in the morning when I opened my eyes, turned on the radio, and listened to a weather report. Then I took down my suitcases, and I packed three pairs of socks, four suits, and three shirts. They don't want you to skip a detail, and if I happen to leave out my toothbrush, someone will say, "Did you pack a toothbrush?" I got in my car, went down to the airport, and went to the window to tell the girl exactly what

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I wanted, and I listened to her conversation. You might not be interested in these things, but the children will sit there—they can't get enough of it. Aren't you interested in what I have in my wallet? Aren't you even curious to know how much money I have? Well they are. The credit card. Whose addresses I have, whose addresses I don't have. Who are the people in those pictures, and so on. What many parents don't realize is that the things that they take so much for granted, children know nothing about. And the commonplace can be fascinating.

For example, I told the children a story a couple of years ago that I had made up. I think it is a good story.

One day the lion called all the animals in the forest together, and when they assembled he said to them, "There's been too much grumbling in the forest, and I'd like to know what you have to be thankful for."

So the little fish jumped up, and said: "Well I am very thankful that it rained yesterday, because if it hadn't rained, I just don't know what would have happened to me. I had no place to go."

The seal said, "I'm happy too, because I jump in and out, and play all the time."

And the bird said: "I am thankful for the trees and the sky. I live in the trees, and I fly in the sky, and this is a great source of contentment for me."

The tiger said that he liked to walk in the sunshine. And the bear said that he appreciated the mountains, because he enjoyed his walks.

And the giraffe said: "You see my long neck, I breathe in air up here, and it goes all the way down here. It gives me a wonderful feeling. I am thankful for the air."



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And the owl said: "I'm not like most of you. I stay up all night, and I am thankful for the stars because they are out all night, and they keep me company and they light up the sky."

The snake said: "I like the sunshine. I just love to stretch out in the sunshine."

Each one of these animals was thankful for something. If you think about it, there isn't anything they were thankful for that could be bought in a store. These things are all around us. So tonight, when you go to bed, maybe you might spend a few moments thinking about what you have to be thankful for. That's another value I want to impart to them.



# III

HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS:

THE HOME



## *Adoption*

Adoption is an accepted fact. It no longer represents any kind of stigma, and there are millions of adopted children in this country alone. Social agencies, churches, physicians, lawyers—all participate in what is a fundamentally humane institution: namely, matching up the child with the right couple. Perhaps someday the orphanage itself will atrophy and die, and no child will ever again be homeless. This having been said, then, what is the problem? Why are so many parents deeply troubled about coping with their adopted children, as well as with outsiders? Shall the adopted child be told, and, if so, when, and what?

*Dentist, thirty-nine, Pennsylvania:*

I haven't yet decided what or when we will tell Judy about her being adopted. I just don't know. Why should I upset her?

*Housewife, thirty-one, New York State:*

Almost from the day we got the baby we called him "our darling adopted boy." He's used to it. He's ours. I think even more so than if I had given birth to him.

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### *Upholsterer, forty, Maryland:*

My wife Phyllis was in the hospital having our first natural baby. JoAnne, our adopted eight-year-old child, was at home with me. She was seven at the time. One day she said to me, "I didn't come out of Mommy's tummy." It wasn't a question. It was a flat statement. I said, "Yes, that's right," and waited for the bomb to fall. But then she said, "Can I have some candy?"

### *Housewife, thirty-four, Maine:*

Betsy knows she's adopted, and all our friends and neighbors know. I don't hide it. But Jimmy, my husband, is funny. You don't dare mention the word "adopted" to him. He just pretends it doesn't exist.

"I think children are not unhappy about it. . . ."

*"I think children are not unhappy about it and accept it quite easily. Mine did." The speaker is a New York City high school teacher of social studies. He and his wife adopted Cindy at the age of six months.*

You start by planting the idea the child is adopted very early—before it is likely to be some sort of shock. If you wait until they are five or six or seven, and suddenly announce it, then the fact that you've waited that long is in itself an

admission, "Why, there must be something wrong with it if you haven't mentioned it before."

Our approach to it was, about the time she was two or two and a half, simply to say something like, "My cute little adopted daughter." We got the word into her vocabulary, so that by the time she was three I would be able to say, "I want to tell you the story about how we had wanted a child," and go through the whole business of how delighted and happy we were when we heard we were going to get one from the agency, and so forth. I think that when one does start that early, and the story is very natural, all kids love to hear about it.

"How could she possibly imagine any circumstances under which anyone would give up a perfect baby?"

*A Baltimore doctor, aged forty-nine:*

I have an adopted daughter of eleven. The adjustment is fine now, but we have had our problems. Things ran pretty smoothly up to about six or seven or so. But by then children become old enough to be concerned about their origins and their natural parents. When that happens, I think it is inevitable there will be pain.

And I'll tell you why. A young child—six, seven, or eight—until he gets into his late teens, simply cannot imagine any circumstances under which anybody would give up a baby unless there was something wrong with it. And this was our own child's reaction. She had been told all through her early infancy and early preschool period that she was a

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beautiful and adorable baby, and she was. She could see how she was welcomed by all her relatives and grandparents and so forth, and she was an exquisite and lovely baby in every way.

Yet when she was about seven or eight we began to be aware that she was unhappy about something. When she had asked about her origins, we had said we didn't know much about it, that we had just been very glad to get her, and all we could say was that her natural parents must have cared very much about her—that they wanted her to have a happy life with other parents, and so forth. This was what the agency people advised us to say at that time.

One day, she said to me, after all this business about how beautiful she was, "Daddy, what is the matter with me?" I suddenly realized that until she had the sexual maturity to understand about out-of-wedlock babies (and such babies constitute almost 90 percent of those available for adoption), no answer can be wholly satisfactory. The simple truth that there is nothing *wrong* is beyond a child's imagination and understanding. When she would see me looking at new babies, when she saw her aunts and uncles having new babies come into the family, the joy, the excitement, the wonder of it all—how in terms of her own life experience could she possibly imagine any circumstances under which anyone would want to give up a perfect baby? This was beyond her experience. My feeling therefore changed.

We decided that we had not told her earlier that her natural parents were dead because that would make her frightened. But now she was old enough, and one night she and my wife were watching the television show, "Rin Tin Tin," where a little boy was supposed to have been adopted



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by an army regiment after his parents were killed by Indians. My wife said to her: "You see what happened to that little boy? Now you are older, and we can tell you your natural parents died. And that's why you were available for adoption." Well, her relief was unbelievable.

"Don't explain it, and it can become a destructive thing."

*A Chicago social worker specializing in child guidance:*

Adoption has to be a part of your life. If you are not ashamed of it, and think this a legitimate avenue for fulfillment of family life, then fine. And if you live with that philosophy, then there is no reason in the world to keep it from your adopted child. I honestly think that if it's kept from children, they somehow sense something and it may one day lead to great unhappiness.

I remember a story one of my former patients once told me. It was during the Korean War, and he had been drafted. In the process, somewhere along the line, he had to get his birth certificate, and at that point his parents told him he was adopted. The effect on the boy was, "Well you must have been ashamed of it or considered it wrong, if you never told me." In other words, even if a child is going to go through periods of being uncomfortable or even experiencing some unhappiness, that's part of life, too. My own adopted son, now eight years old, recently said to my wife, "I wish I had come from you." And she answered him. "Yes, I can understand that. Of course that is the natural way to feel. I feel

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that way too. But we are lucky to be together, and that's what really counts." I thought that a perfect reply.

"They . . . decided to say nothing."

*A Connecticut housewife, forty, tells here of an unusual experience.*

My sister and her husband assumed that if they said nothing, moved to another state—you know—almost altered their personalities, what with the changed birth certificates and such, the child would never find out. They adopted a child when they were living in Rochester, and decided to say nothing. But nothing. Even their neighbors didn't know. I mean, if you adopt a baby, you bring it home, and show it off, and that's that. You don't parade around saying, "Here's my pretty little adopted baby." My sister and her husband took the child, and moved to California where his relatives had some vague business connections, but where nobody knew them, and where they planned to adopt a second child. By this time the first was six, and in order to carry through this fantastic plot, my sister started actually to pad her clothing so that the six-year-old, Freddy, would think his mother was having a baby. She told everybody about her pregnancy and went through the whole business of getting bigger and bigger.

And then the roof fell in. It turned out that the child that had been promised to them and whom they now had, came from a young unmarried girl, and she tried to reclaim

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the child after a year or so. It was in the newspapers. There was court litigation. The parents were weeping and hysterical. Lawyers, courts, suits, and so forth. All the attempts to hide, to move away, to get a new job, to pretend pregnancy, were futile. And the older child found out anyway. They lost the second baby.

**"To My Adopted Daughter: I Wish I Hadn't Told You."**

*By Henrietta Sloane Whitmore\**

We really have been quite casual about this momentous event. Several times I had said to your father, "Let's get a baby." And each time he had replied, "Very well." I might have been suggesting nothing more important than going to a neighborhood movie. But, as you'll soon learn, we are a somewhat impulsive pair.

One evening, I was in bed reading the newspaper and he was brushing his teeth in the bathroom (you ought to know the exact circumstances of your begetting), and I said, "Well, tomorrow I'm going to put in our order for a baby. Is that okay with you?" "Okay, sure," he bumbled, his mouth full of dentifrice foam. I happened to meet a friend on the bus the next day, a doctor who was head obstetrician of a big hospital. We were thinking of adopting a baby, I told him, so would he keep his eyes open for a girl baby? He would, but added—as if I didn't know—that we might have to wait for months, perhaps a year. However, the very next day, he telephoned to say, "There's a baby in the warehouse now, and if it's the right sex, I'll let you know." The following

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morning, he phoned again to say "it" was out of the warehouse—"an exceptionally alert, bright, female infant." We'd better hurry right over.

I remember the interminable walk down the long, straight corridor of the maternity ward. The air was heavy with the smell of drugs and faintly vibrating with the cries of newborn babies. We came to a stop before a closed door. I whispered to Daddy, "We'll probably be doing this many times before we find the right baby." Just then the door opened, and the doctor walked out. He was followed by a nurse carrying a bundle. You!

I am now informed, by experienced welfare people, that your adoption was an unusual case—very unusual indeed. For we bypassed the investigations and torturous interviews by caseworkers. We were given, says our doctor friend, first option on you. However, everything was—and is—perfectly legal. The doctor, a well-respected and influential man in medical and civic circles, gave us a clean bill of health and satisfactory financial, moral, and mental ratings. We just claimed you before you went into the public domain. "Unlikely to happen again that way," say welfare authorities.

You were delivered to us, by a nurse in a taxicab, when you were five days old. I signed a receipt for your safe delivery, just like getting a package from a department store. We had installed your own nurse to await your arrival. She was horrified to discover that your poor little rear was as red and raw as fresh beefsteak. But such is the resilience of the very young that you were soon smooth, silken, and pink all over. Your nurse was further put out to discover that our Dalmation dog was using your bathroom. She marched into the living room with his brush, comb, towel, flea powder, and

soap and said, "I'm sorry, but I cannot have the dog's things—or the dog—in the baby's bathroom." "Tsk! Tsk!" clucked Daddy. "Now we'll have to return the baby to the hospital." The nurse will learn, I'm sure, that Daddy loves to tease. But that day, she hurried back to you and hugged you fiercely to her bosom, for fear his threat might come true.

Your daddy, of course adores you. Today he telephoned me from downtown to say, "Darling, I know our daughter now has everything an infant could want and loads of stuff she'll never need. But I bought just one more thing for her." Excitedly I asked, "What did you get?" And he said, in his straight-face voice, "Oh, I bought myself a beautiful pair of expensive English shoes, so I'll be able to wheel her around in her beautiful, expensive English buggy."

The hospital authorities told us we could take you for six months on probation. If, at the end of that time, we were not satisfied with you, for any reason at all, we could return you. How ridiculous! We would not return you if you were cross-eyed and spavined. And you're not. You're the loveliest little creature imaginable. Send you back? I would rather cut off my arm. Daddy too! . . .

You have now been with us for eight months. You have been legally adopted. The judge handed you your birth certificate, which you promptly started to chew. "Hey there, young lady," he cried, "don't eat the evidence, or you'll be up for contempt of court." The judge then solemnly enjoined us to treat you as our natural child. He said, "This child now has all the rights and privileges, including the rights of inheritance, of one born to you." Well, that's nice. Already Daddy is wondering what you'll do with his precious Guadagnini violin when you inherit it.

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We received a brand-new birth certificate when your adoption was completed. It says, in nice italic type, that you are our child. Isn't that wonderful? Already Daddy and I feel you were born to us. If we do not wish to, we need not tell you you are adopted. But all the wise people say we should. The hospital authorities who passed you over to us, and the several books that I've read about "the chosen child," and the psychologists, the welfare agencies, the knowledgeable caseworkers, our good friend the doctor who found you for us—all, without exception, advocate telling a child, at the earliest possible moment, that he or she was adopted. So be it!

We will defer to these experienced, intelligent authorities. And yet—and yet—there is a niggling doubt in my mind. For I would prefer not to tell you. However, I do not voice this subversive thought to anyone, not even to Daddy. It's like advocating not saluting the American flag. The custom is sacrosanct. So we speak of you to friends and new acquaintances (the relatives all know it, of course) as "our dear little adopted daughter." Sounds a little sticky to Daddy and me, but that's the way the books seem to want it.

Some persons, learning that we have adopted an infant, tell us how noble we are. Noble? Heavens, we are rankly selfish. What is so noble about buying a new home, a car, a fur coat, a trip to Europe? We adopted an infant from precisely the same motives. We wanted, chiefly, to benefit ourselves, not to benefit a baby. Oh, mind you, I don't say this is bad. Indeed, it works out beautifully to the advantage of the adopters and the adoptee. But it is certainly not a noble impulse.

One of Daddy's musician friends was nonplused by our action. "How could you do it?" he said. "Someone else's

child. Not a drop of your blood in her veins." Daddy was greatly amused. Human foibles, as you'll soon learn, usually amuse your father. He is seldom, if ever, angered, and he is, times out of number, fascinated and intrigued by *la comédie humaine*. The remark I just quoted, for example. "How strange." I heard him reply, but he was smiling as he said it. "Yes, strange. All of us seem highly dissatisfied with ourselves. We long to change into someone else—to be taller or shorter, wiser and richer, younger or older, shrewder, more powerful. We want to have a good singing voice or be able to paint or write poetry or wrestle—anything but what we are. Yet when it comes to our child—ah, then we desire that our precious blood flow in his veins. We want him to look like us, even though we have never cared much for our face or figure or the color of our eyes." Daddy let this sink in, then added, "Since you ask me, let me say I am glad that none of my blood runs in her veins. At least, I won't have to worry for fear my not-so-good traits or none-so-handsome features will show up in her." My dear, your father is unusually modest. He has a splendid character and is quite nice-looking.

You are four years old. You know you are an adopted child. This awareness pops up unexpectedly and often very amusingly. Yesterday, I took you to visit friends who recently adopted an infant girl. You stood there, your small feet planted firmly on the floor, and said, with great seriousness, "Do you know, Mrs. Evans, I am a doctored child, too?" . . .

You are six years old. We no longer speak of you as "our dear little adopted daughter." No need to. Everyone, including you, is well aware of your status. Not that you understand exactly what "adopted" means. Vaguely you do. It's concerned with your friends' having come out of their

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mothers' tummies, while you came out of somebody else's tummy, not mine. I don't know where you picked up this piece of biological data. It isn't a phrase your father or I would ever use. We have lately come up against a disquieting occurrence. Learning that you are an adopted child, many persons have remarked in your hearing, "What a lucky little girl she is. I hope she appreciates all you are doing for her." "Oh, but she is not lucky," I protest. "It is we, my husband and I, who are the lucky ones." My chagrin, indeed my anger, comes from knowing that you heard—and must have heard many times—this tactless, stupid remark.

At such times as these, the niggling doubt I've buried in my mind—the doubt about the wisdom of telling you what welfare people call "the truth"—beings to fester afresh. Last week, you told me that the neighbors' daughter, a girl three years older than you, had said, "You don't look a bit like your parents. Maybe you're Swedish." We have not happened to confide the facts of your life to the Swedish neighbors, and though the girl's remark may have been an inverted compliment, it seemed to bother you. I couldn't help but feel then—how unfair! The little girl could hurt you without even knowing. The hurt came because you, not she, knew. I notice that the term "adopted daughter" now has a different connotation for you. It is no longer a precise term for a very special child, the adored daughter of two loving parents. It has overtones. Dark overtones. At times, I have the chilling feeling that you think an adoptee is a second-class child.

It was cute—or we thought it was—when, with gentle parental prompting, you would tell a guest the story of how we got you. "I was the only baby they looked at," you would



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say, like a child reciting "Little Jack Horner." But yesterday, when asked to tell this oft-repeated tale, you threw a mild fit and screamed, "No! No! I don't want to tell that any more!" Daddy and I were surprised, because you've always been a pliant, easy-to-manage child. However, we agreed that never again would you be asked to tell this story.

You seem to have a fierce urge to belong to a family, a spread-out family, with many cousins, aunts, and uncles. And you have an insatiable curiosity about our relatives in distant lands—Australia and England. I do my best to satisfy this urge and this curiosity. I show you family portraits—Daddy's and mine—in my big heirloom album, with the red plush cover and the ornate brass lock and hinges. "This is your great-aunt Vera, in Melbourne, Australia. Stingiest woman who ever lived. She mixes her own hair dye from powders. Sometimes her hair is a deep purple. And one time it came out pea-green." You shout with laughter, "Green Aunt Vera." "And look here," I continue. "This is her sister Milly. Aunt Vera calls her 'the baby,' although she is quite an old lady. They are very rich, but live in two little rooms heaped with old newspapers and empty boxes. They have no children, for they never married. I sent them your picture to show them what a lovely little great-niece they have." And then we look at the photographs of boy cousins in Australia and of Daddy's beautiful sisters and their handsome children in America, and I say, "You have a grand lot of young cousins."

Your seventh birthday has come and gone. A big change has come into your life. You've said good-by to your beloved Nursie. The parting was wrenching on both sides. She has

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been with you for seven years, and you love her deeply. But we are going to move to another state, and Nursie herself said it was time to leave you.

She had something on her mind, she said, and felt she had to tell me before she left. Her tone was so serious that I became alarmed. Good heavens, what had you been doing? Oh, no, it was no misdemeanor. It was your dream mother—rather, your own truly mother, as you call her, the one whose tummy you came out of. Nursie heard about this truly mother one day when you were being punished, by me, for some minor misdeed—talking freshly, I think. Your own truly mother would never have confined you to your room. This dream mother, I learn, is utterly unlike me. She is the most beautiful creature imaginable. Her long, thick golden hair falls in shimmering waves. Her dresses are gorgeous creations of silk and velvet. And she has magnificent jewels. (I don't wear jewelry, and clothes interest me little.) Your really truly father, you tell Nursie, is tall, broad, and handsome. (Daddy is slim, dark, and five feet nine.)

I learn, too, that you have begun in your small, inadequate way, to search for your truly mother. Didn't I remember, asked Nursie, when I took you with me, last week, to the beauty parlor? How you sidled up to a booth where sat a young woman with shining golden hair? I suppose your little heart pumped furiously at the thought of the welcome you would get when this dream lady recognized you as her baby. But, says Nursie, your hopes were shattered when you saw she was having the golden color applied with a little brush. To Nursie's great surprise, I took this revelation lightly. I even laughed. Fantasy! Juvenile escapism! All children indulge in them. But Nursie seems intent on smash-

ing my complacency. She tells me that you have been sobbing yourself to sleep for many nights. When she asked you what was troubling you, you cried piteously, "I don't want to be adopted. I want my own truly mummy and daddy. I want my own family."

I have told Daddy, but he is not greatly upset. He says everything will come out all right. After all, don't most children have fits of hostility and rebellion? I answer yes, but this, I feel has a deeper origin. I now voice a regret that we told you you were adopted. Daddy says I'm crazy to think such a thing. "Why, she'd be sure to find out sooner or later, and then you'd have a real problem on your hands."

Now you are nine. And we are living in a house of our very own. You've made many new friends. I discovered that you told a special chum you were adopted. And the news spread. Happily, your new friends appear to regard this as a distinction. It's romantic. But last week, one little toad-in-the-hole, a boy, said to you—I don't know why—"Oh, pooh, you're only adopted. Your mummy couldn't have a baby. She had to buy one." You cried as you related this remark to me. I cuddled you in my arms and told you, "Of course you're adopted, darling. You've always known that. And aren't you proud? Imagine, out of all the babies we might have had, we chose you. Now, take that Jimmy who was mean to you. I happen to know that his mother was longing for a little girl. She had made all little pink things for a girl baby, and Jimmy showed up. His mother had to keep him whether she wanted him or not." This is strictly in conformance with adoption procedure. But this saccharine appraisal of the adopted child no longer placates you. You sobbed, "But she's his own truly mother. And she loves him

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now. I know she does. He came out of her tummy, that's why." (I am beginning to hate this phrase.)

You seem to believe that some magic bond exists between a natural child and his parents, something an adopted child is forever blocked off from. One of your friends has two alcoholic parents. The other evening, there was a terrible scene at her home, and the girl came running to our place to sleep here. I overheard you say to her, "Don't you wish you could get someone to adopt you and take you away?" But your friend answered quickly, "Oh, no, they're my parents. I love them. They're swell to me when they're not drunk." . . .

We have now been in this pretty house for three years. Sometimes I sense a smoldering hostility in you. You seem to have drifted far from us. And we are not able to reach you—the deep, inner you. I want to talk confidingly to you, but you elude me. Daddy tries, too, and is bewildered and hurt by your apartness. Friends and family tell me, consolingly, not to worry, all children go through phases of resentment, of antiparent feelings. I could accept this, perhaps, if I didn't know you are deeply unhappy. And I feel that your unhappiness has been building up for years and stems from knowing you are adopted. .

You are free to invite as many friends as you like—and as often as you please—to visit, to eat, to sleep here. Yesterday, a group of girls stormed into the living room and squatted before the fire. Gay, chattering, artless. I was knitting in the sunroom, taking little notice of the conversation until the group, with one voice, protested something. There was some talk about the Daughters of the American Revolution. One girl said smugly, "When I grow up, I can join the D.A.R.

But my mother can't. I can get in from my father's side." You said, "I bet I can join that old D.A.R. if I want to." But the girls chorused, "Oh, no, you couldn't. Why, you don't even know who your parents are."

I expected you, in the evening, to tell me about this new wound. But you did not come. And I know, now, that the wall between us is high and solid.

Suddenly you have developed a twitching in your face. Daddy and I have been advised not to refer to it. We heed the advice, though it is almost unendurable to sit at the dinner table and see the contortions of your pretty little features. Then, of your own accord, you ask if I will take you to a doctor—"So my face will stop twitching, because I can't help it."

For two months, now, you have been going—not to a doctor, but to a psychologist, a woman of compassion and vast understanding. I learn some bitter facts. I had no conception of the depth of your misery. Nor had Daddy. You feel like an imposter, I am told. For one thing, the church you attend may not be the one to which you rightfully belong. For another, you think that your "cousins" are more blessed with talent than you are. They are naturally musical, or can draw well, write poetry, dance with skill. Not you. It proves (to you) that you are different, alien to us all. Many more unnerving disclosures are cited. The most disturbing, to me and Daddy, is that you have a deep feeling of obligation to us, yet you cannot express your gratitude.

This last statement of the psychologist was too much for me. I burst out with, "But good heavens, gratitude, obligation, any expression of appreciation is the very last thing we would ask from our child. Why should she—or any child—

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feel grateful for being adopted? How could she come to such a false conclusion?" "She seems to have heard it, on and off, all her life," said the specialist. "But not from her father or me," I cried. "It doesn't matter," the psychologist said. "Very often the damage is done to a child by outsiders."

It is a year since you began to visit the psychologist. And I've come to believe in miracles. I don't remember just when the facial tic left you. I don't remember when you came running to my room, as you did when you were a small child, to tell me about some important—or even unimportant—event. Daddy doesn't remember when you asked him to go walking with you again, and you took his hand in silent intimacy. And I don't know all that went on between you and the psychologist. I do know that she was able to impress certain irrefutable facts on you. One, you would always be an adopted child. There would always be certain differences between you and other members of our family. But so there are in all families. Love is love, whether it's from an adoptive parent or a natural one. You have every right to get mad at us on occasion—but not bitter, not hostile. She made you realize you could not change the circumstances of your birth or subsequent events. So why fight them?

But the road back was not all smooth going. Not for us or for you. One day, when you were sixteen, you said to Daddy and me, with a tiny trace of defiance, "I should like to find my real mother. Will you help me?" We had been steeling ourselves for such a request. I told you, as calmly as I could, that we would give you the name of the hospital where you were born and the name of our friend, the doctor who was present at your birth. And we would give you the money to go to the city where you were born. But you would

have to take it from there, because neither Daddy nor I could bring ourselves to assist you in this search. But nothing happened. And a week later, I asked you, casually, how you were progressing in your attempt to find (I could not utter the words "your real mother") the one you wanted. Suddenly you melted into my arms in a storm of weeping. "I don't want to find her," you sobbed. "Not ever. She gave me up once. How do I know she would want to see me now?"

It's hard to realize that you are nineteen. You have been away a whole year in college. Almost from the beginning, you have been writing about Peter. So at New Year's, when you floated out of the house wreathed in chiffon and the rapture of love, with Peter at your side, I said to Daddy, "We'll have an engaged daughter tomorrow."

But when you came to my room, at nearly dawn, I could see you were not engaged. Yes, Peter had asked you to marry him. And you'd said, "Yes." And you had sat, the two of you, talking for hours. Where you'd be married. Where you would live. How many children you'd have. Then, with Peter's arms around you, you told him you were adopted. The whole story. He was suddenly silent. Did it make any difference? you asked. No, no, of course not. But you felt his arms stiffen. And he began to talk in a peculiar, jerky voice. "No, it makes no difference. Honestly, But gee! I never imagined anything like that. It's just that—well, I don't know how my folks will take it." You were calm—too calm, I thought—as you told me the shoddy tale. "I'll never see him again," you said with finality. "Good riddance!" I replied, hiding the compassion and sympathy I felt for you. "It proves that this precious Peter is shallow, narrow, full of mass-produced prejudices. Who does he think he is, with his

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perverted genealogical values? My darling, you would never be happy with such a husband." Then you wept and said, "I know! I know! But I love—I loved him." And even though you didn't say it, I felt sure you were thinking, "And if I hadn't told him I was adopted, we would have married and lived happily ever after." Perhaps!

Now that you are twenty-one, I take a backward look at your adoption. With the inexhaustible wisdom of hindsight, I know this—if I had to do it all over again, I would not tell you you were adopted. I say this in the face of the inexorable stand of the adoption authorities and the professional counselors. For I now see that with all our deep and enduring love for you, we could not shield or insulate you from the wounding remarks of tactless outsiders or from the cruelties of children. We could not spare you the mental agony of wondering who you were, or the anguish of realizing that you had been given up, not wanted by your real mother. We could not comfort you because you felt inadequate, unworthy, not endowed with the talents of the other children in the family. We could not lift from your little heart the crushing obligation you felt—because we had adopted you. Nor could we banish your sense of guilt because you were unable to express the proper amount of appreciation and gratitude.

When I ask the specialists to tell me why one must conform to this rule of telling, they say, one and all, "Because the child will find out sooner or later."

I challenge this statement! I could have tried, as far as humanly possible to prevent you from finding out. Daddy and I might have moved to another town with our newborn infant. Perhaps it's wildly fanciful, but we might even have gone away for a year and come back to the same town with a



born-to-us baby. If, later on, someone had hinted that you were adopted, I would have produced your birth certificate—it says you are our child—and I would have asked you, “Whom do you believe—that old gossip, or your very own mother and father?” “You’d tell the child a lie?” ask the purists. I smile, for I have read several books by authorities who cite, though they do not outspokenly recommend it, the practice of many adoptive parents, who tell a child, curious about his origin, that his first parents died. It seems to me that having a child believe he is the offspring of his parents would avoid a lot of verbal twisting later on. After all, natural parents do not have to impress on their children that they were born to them.

I am not prescribing a course of action for anyone else to follow. A denial of the adoption, a move to another city, a pretended pregnancy may be repugnant as well as impossible to many adoptive parents. Perhaps you will agree with me, though, that the knowledge that one is adopted creates far more problems than the one it is supposed to solve.

I have spoken to several adoptive parents recently, and I am amazed to find how many of their experiences parallel ours. One mother of a twelve-year-old adopted girl told me last week, that the child had come home from school—an elegant private school—crying because a boy had said to her, “You’re only a bastard!” At least, you were spared that insult.

Since we got you, the adoption laws of many states have been changed and improved. An increasing number of states provide for the issuance of a new birth certificate when a child is legally adopted. And many states seal the adoptee’s birth record. The hospital authorities told us that your record had been destroyed. I do not know whether this is

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true. But it all seems to indicate that if one decides not to proclaim a child is adopted, it is possible to live by this decision.

Don't you wish we had?

“ . . . the loving and the nurturing and the caring . . . ”

*“I think it would be a terrible mistake ever to tell a child something to the effect that his natural mother was no good, and therefore she had to give up her child for adoption.” The speaker is a Long Island, New York, lawyer, who has two adopted children.*

It seems to me the adopted parent needs to sort out his own feelings as to whether he is a successful human being. Never mind the troubles and failings of an anonymous natural parent. The thing I found most in other parents of adopted children was that many of them felt that somehow, in some mysterious manner, they had failed, that they didn't feel thoroughly masculine or feminine. Inevitably those feelings are transmitted to their kids.

Now that Margo, my wife, and I understand profoundly our own experiences with adoption, we try to tell other couples who have recently adopted a child that the biological function of having a baby has nothing to do with parenthood. There are perfectly lousy mothers and fathers who can have babies, and this, in my eyes, is not parenthood. Parenthood is the loving and the nurturing and the caring, and I think that once you give that kind of positive feeling to parents, then they are able to express that to their children.

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We have four children, two of them adopted. One Sunday morning I heard all the kids battling about the television in the downstairs living room. I went down, and while I have no idea what the argument was all about, I did hear Barbara, one of our natural children, turn to the two adopted kids and say, "You're not even their child—not even Mommy and Daddy's child."

I was hurt, and I had to think quickly. I walked into the living room, quieted them down, and sat them all on the couch. "All right," I remember saying, "you, Rebecca, go out and stand in the hall. And you, Millie, go out and stand on the back porch. Marion, you go down into the basement, and Barbara, you march yourself upstairs. And wait there until I call you."

And then I waited for a moment or two and called them back, one at a time. When they were all back together on the couch I told them something like this: "Now we are here together. I am your father. You are my children. We are a family with the same wonderful mother. Does it make the least bit of difference which door you came through?" I know they appreciated that, and I don't even expect to have any serious dissension ever again.

"... a question that ... mothers dread ..."

*Housewife, thirty, Detroit, Michigan, suburb:*

I belonged to a group made up of mothers with adopted children in Detroit and vicinity. It was pretty much a social thing, but we would discuss problems over coffee now and

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then. It was there I heard of a good answer to a question that some mothers of adopted children dread, "Why don't you have your own children, Mommy?" It was a beautiful answer of how a father was taking his adopted child of about eight or nine to get some seeds. The father didn't know beforehand he was going to use the experience in this way, but he did. They got the seeds and planted them in the garden. Some came up, and some didn't. The father then pointed out that some seeds germinated, and some didn't. He said that this sometimes happens with people who want to have babies, that this is one of the factors that may enter into the need for adoption. The nice part about this approach is it takes it completely away from having anything to do with masculinity or femininity. It just is one of these accidents of nature.

"We have the answers."

*This speaker owns a taxi fleet in a large northeastern city. He is forty-eight, his wife forty-one, and they have five children, three of them adopted.*

I've overheard Neil, my natural boy, now ten, telling his three adopted brothers that they weren't his "real brothers." This wasn't a shock. We expected it along the way. You never know from what quarter it is going to come. And Aaron, one of our adopted, came and said, "Aren't they my real brothers?" Our answer to this was, "Of course, they are. What do you mean they are not your real brothers?" Well he said, "They are not my *real* brothers." I said: "Don't

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we all live together? Aren't we all in the same house? Aren't Mommy and Daddy Mommy and Daddy to all of us?" There was no question. In other words, the question of real brothers—he didn't carry it over. He didn't make the tie-in between the adoption and the nonadoption. He never questioned that aspect of it. It was just that this older child made a comment. All he came back to us for was an affirmation that they were his real brothers. He never asked any more than that.

Had he asked more than that, we would have answered. We don't attempt to give more of a background or explanation than the immediate question asks. But Aaron is a child. He wants an answer to an immediate question right now. If he isn't satisfied he will ask another question, or he will look dissatisfied. If he is satisfied, his mind hops to other things.

### *His wife.*

For some reason adoption has become a mystery to the average preadolescent. One day one of our kids said, "Why did my parents give me away?" Well, it's easy to plan an answer in advance, but when the child asks it all of a sudden, what can you say? But we had a plan, my husband and I. We always knew what general type of question would arise. But we made up our minds to tell a story, part true and part false, to all our kids. We believe that until the child becomes a parent himself and knows what children really mean to adults, he cannot know what it's all about. We generally said that their original parents had died before they were born. Adoption and discussions of origins are tied up with sex. What does any kid know about an unmarried girl in trouble, an outcast from her family and friends because of a mistake?

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Then, too, rejection by the person who gave them life is a terrible, terrible thing. They want to know why their mother and father didn't want them. Why, indeed? And I don't think that any adult has the right to give a youngster, say five through twelve or so, this cross to bear at a time when he cannot understand it.

So we find it easier to tell our children that they came out of a normal union, and that the parents died. If they ask how they died we have the answers, too.

If you have to tell your children they're adopted, do it with some discretion and sensibility. A couple we knew adopted a daughter, and the night she and her boyfriend announced their engagement in her parents' home, her mother, an elementary school principal, mind you, said, "Well, now is the time to tell you that you are an adopted child." The girl went into shock, and had to have extensive treatments. Thank God she came out of it. And I believe that it was all so avoidable. If they hadn't told her before, what was the need for it then? Of course, it's easier and simpler not to tell them, but you have to tell them sometime, and with the greatest amount of intelligence and common sense.

#### *Mother, thirty-seven, Boston, Massachusetts:*

When my children asked, "What is wrong with me, why didn't my natural parents want to keep me?" I let them know that their parents couldn't keep them, and had to give them up, and that is really a wonderful thing.

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*A Presbyterian minister speaks of his own adopted child and of what he likes to tell his parishioners.*

You simply cannot deny life. I think it is really over-protecting them when we think that somehow, by being good parents, there are ways we can defend our children from realities.

The world is a pretty painful place right now, and I think that any attempt to hide them behind all sorts of emotional and other cushions isn't a healthy way for them to grow up. Secondly, it is hardly preparation for survival in the kind of world these kids are growing up in, where there are going to be some overwhelming and terrifying and terribly challenging problems. To deny anything in life, whatever it may be, whether it is the financial problem in the family or the vocational problems of a father, whatever difficulties there may be in terms of relatives and friends, this is part of life, and I think the wise parent takes the attitude, "I will be strong enough, and I have faith that I can help my children be strong enough to meet these challenges." This includes adoption as well as anything else.

Then there is another terribly important part, and it is related to the business of adoption. "If we really have confidence in you as a human being," we are saying to our kids, "why should we think you can't meet this part of life? As you grow older you will gain the ability to meet whatever this thing is, including the fact that we are not your *biological* parents. You are a fine and wonderful person with all kinds of possibilities; we love you as much as any parents ever loved their child; you are *our* child, and this thing should not throw you." It is this kind of confidence in a

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child that is far more valid in helping him grow than to hide or run away from the facts.

"I don't think parents have to have all the answers."

*"I would most certainly think twice before telling any child of mine—or any other, for that matter—five years or younger, that he or she was adopted," said a director of a family service center in Southern California.*

The point is, what meaning does it have? A three- or four- or five-year-old needs desperately to be a part of things, to be a part of the family. In fact, this whole notion about the way children learn of adoption is a bit silly. When you come down to it, it depends on the way parents handle it. Look, it doesn't make a damn bit of difference what you tell a child anyway. It's the whole relationship. I mean that we place too much stress on the business of telling kids at a certain age and in a certain way that we have got the parents so self-conscious about the very words they use that the whole thing is nonsense. I now tell parents that if they are going to err in the direction of getting involved in explanations and telling too much, then I think it better not to say anything. Kids have to be ready for what you tell them. To me, saying too much to youngsters in kindergarten or first grade is like sitting down with a six- or seven-year-old, and giving them all the details of how you and your husband engaged in sexual intercourse the night before. They aren't interested. They have no understanding of it.

I think that, if I adopted a child, I would wait for the



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perfectly appropriate opportunity. When they're a mature six, or seven, or eight, they're pretty sharp little customers. This is the time I think best to tell them. If questions like, "How was I born? How did you get me? Why did you pick me? What was wrong with my first mother when she gave me away?" should arise, then and only then would I say more.

Then I would tell the way we adopted them, and how pleased we were to have them, that for one reason or another some mommies and daddies cannot take care of their children, and how lucky we were to get them.

No matter what you do, as the child becomes older and more sophisticated he is going to develop and nourish all sorts of fantasies about his beginnings. But so what? It's perfectly natural, and I don't think parents always have to have all the answers.

## *Divorce*

In this country, in these years, nearly one out of every four couples terminate their marriage vows with divorce. Another 1.5 couples will do virtually the same, even though they never reach a courtroom. But the fact is that since divorce is so probable in far too many cases, and the instances of single parents rearing their young are mushrooming, all the blood and thunder of editorials, pulpits, and assorted moralists would have even far less impact than they do if children were not involved.

“It isn’t right to bring children up to hate.”

*“Charley left me shortly after our honeymoon, and I’ve simply never seen him again. He consented to a divorce through his lawyer, and that was that. I know that I hate him for it, but we did conceive a child, and Randy is all mine. This is a thirty-three-year-old teacher, living near San Francisco.*

Randy has never seen his father, and when he was six or seven he finally asked about it. He wanted to know where his father was. And I said, “Honey, your father lives a long way

from here, in New Jersey." And he said, "Is that why he never comes to see me?" "I think it probably is," I answered. "It would take too long to get here."

"Well, doesn't he love me?" he asked. My answer was that I didn't know. "Honey," I said, "he doesn't come to see me either." But I pointed out to him that he wasn't so badly off. Randy has a large family of grandparents and cousins and uncles and aunts. But I know it still bothers him. Last month his school had a father-son dinner, and he refused to go, even though Stephen, my brother, offered to take him.

Since then he says next to nothing. However, just before he left for camp this past summer he suddenly asked, "What shall I say if anyone asks me about my father?" I looked him straight in the eye and said, "Randy, you know that your father left me before you were born, and that we are divorced, and that he lives on the east coast. That's what you can say." I'm always tempted to tell him what a mean, cold-hearted bastard his father was, but I don't. I know it's important for me to contain myself. But I feel what I feel. Still, it isn't right to bring children up to hate.

*A seven-year-old:*

I have a new daddy now. My daddy says I shouldn't call my new daddy, Daddy, but Mommy says I can call him Daddy, too, because he loves me. My daddy says if I call my new daddy Daddy I should call his wife Mommy. They have a baby and Mommy calls him Daddy's new baby and Daddy's new wife wants me to call him brother.

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"We acted as a united front for their sakes."

*A forty-three-year-old copy editor on a southern daily newspaper who has been divorced for two years:*

I have three youngsters, two girls, ten and twelve, and a boy going on eight. Glenda, my eldest, heard about our divorce in a particularly unfortunate way. My wife's father and mother came to the house one night, and my father-in-law—he's a big surgeon down here—made quite a scene, cursing me and blaming me for being a poor provider. All the while Betty, my wife, let me have it too, telling her folks she despised me and no longer wanted to live with me. She even screamed about our miserable sex life. But as I say, unhappily our daughter Glenda was on the staircase and heard everything. After the in-laws left she broke into tears, and was quite upset. It lasted for a long time, for several months, as a matter of fact.

Before this none of the youngsters was aware that our marriage was shattered. They were oblivious of the estrangement which had been going on for some time between Betty and me. We certainly behaved properly before the children, and were never openly hostile to each other. We always kept up some form of front. And when we finally had our hand forced by my wife's father's coarseness, and told the children, they were quite surprised.

We sat them down, and told them all at the same time. Glenda had had some of the shock wear off but Wendy, the second girl, started to cry. I guess she felt, "Why does this have to happen to me and to our family?" "Couldn't we both live in the same house and not talk to each other?"

and things of that sort. Together, Betty and I acted as a united front for their sakes. We told them that no matter what happened, we were their mother and father. That we will always love them as if we were all living together as a family, and perhaps even more. And then I told them something like this: Even though I won't be living with you, I will be seeing you frequently. I am going to live in the city, and will be as far away as the telephone. Anytime you wish to speak to me, pick up the phone and call. I gave them two numbers where I could always be reached. And I stressed more than anything that while Mother and I no longer loved each other, we both loved each of them just as much as we ever did.

I think it's worked out, at least for these years. I see them one day each week and one weekend a month. During the summers, they're mine for two weeks. They seem happy with the arrangement. The girls like to think they have taken the place of their mother in my life. They are forever busy in my kitchen, set the table, and constantly fuss over me. But while I have no regrets, I hope that their marriages won't be as troubled as their parents' marriage was.

"I remember how horrible it all was."

*Here is a bright seventeen-year-old girl, a high school senior, in Wilmington, Delaware, looking back at her own experiences as the child of a broken marriage.*

My parents separated seven years ago. I don't hold that against them, for if people cannot stand the sight of each

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other, there's not much alternative. But what I can never forgive them for was the way they broke up.

I can't precisely remember my reaction, but it bordered on shock and disbelief. I suppose that I could have adjusted to that, too. But it was the way they each tried to hurt the other, never once considering my feelings, that I hated more than anything else. They never merely explained "why." Instead, they both told me, a ten-year-old girl who believed them perfect beings, stories about each other. My God, I didn't know or care what they did with other men and women or to themselves. I just wanted them to stay together, and if that wasn't possible, at least to tell me why. I think all that I really wanted from them was a feeling that my own world wouldn't come crashing down.

Instead, my mother would tell me about Dad's girl friends—if they existed at all and I couldn't have cared less—how he hounded her, never gave her enough money, and she even went so far as to get me to give up speaking to him. And Dad wasn't any better. Mother, he told me constantly, was a nag, a cold and frigid woman who never cared about him, and who spent all of his salary. They communicated for a while by sending messages through me, and both were in favor of a court case until my uncle, my father's wonderful brother, convinced them of the damaging effect it would have on me. All this was right out in the open. No attempt was ever made to hide anything from me.

I remember how horrible it all was, how envious I was of other girls with peaceful family lives, how terribly ashamed I always felt. Once, in summer camp—I was twelve at the time—I told my counselors that I was an orphan. I wished it were true.

"Yes, but Daddy is alone now."

*This is a divorcee, thirty-five, a chic, attractive, articulate, free-lance fashion model who has had a very successful professional career. She has recently remarried, eighteen months after her divorce.*

One day we were discussing his school work and suddenly, like most intelligent youngsters, Gene, my nine-year-old, asked me, "Mommy, do you love Daddy?" I was about to ask him which Daddy he meant, but he quickly added, "You know, my real Daddy. Do you love him?"

Now I had thought about this myself for a long time, as I don't think a divorced person can quite erase the memory of her first love from her mind. So I came back with something like this:

"I do love him, because without him I couldn't have had you." He said, "Well, then, how come you don't live with him?" I explained that my new husband was the one I chose to live with now and he answered, "Yes, but Daddy is alone now." I was touched. Not at my first husband's plight, but at Gene's sensitivity. "Why couldn't you live with Daddy again?" he asked, again and again. What can you tell an eight-year-old? Of hates and loves, and sex and guilt, and bitter battles? Of interfering in-laws and nasty lawyers and relatives? Of the changes that two people undergo as they mature? I repeated what I had said so often to my son. I told him that we had loved each other when we married, but that after a while we argued a great deal, and that we could no longer get on, and decided it was better to separate. Now,

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I told Gene, we are both happier. And that was all. Apparently all the boy wanted was to be reassured that I loved his father. That was the uppermost thing in his mind. I told him truthfully that I did. I loved him—not enough to be able to live with him—but I loved him as my son's father because, if not for him, we couldn't "have had you, Gene."

#### *A divorced mother:*

Still, I cannot stop pitying my son. He has no real father. Because of the divorce, I can now give him a good life, a life that he never could have had with his real father, a life that he never could have had had I remained a divorcee. The boy has everything now—love, attention, affection, respect. But I pity him. I can't help it. That I can't explain to him.

#### *Editor, forty-four, New York City:*

We were civilized. There was no ugliness at all. No hysteria. Johnny and I invited the girls into the living room after dinner for a family conference. Quietly, we told them. It was agreed beforehand, of course, that Johnny would indicate he had asked for the divorce. That is the gracious way, don't you agree? He explained that our separation had arisen from a multiplicity of causes. He also remarked that our coming divorce was, in the last analysis, best for all of us. I make it a point to be perfectly controlled in front of my children. They never see me weep.



## *Divorce*

*Truck driver, twenty-seven, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania:*

I was nine years old when my parents busted up. Milly, my kid sister, was five. Pop just dropped out of our lives. Nobody told us nothin'. Only that he was workin' out of town. Ma believed that you didn't share this kind of thing with us kids. Her whole idea was "you gotta protect the kids." She meant well.

My Pop and me was very close. I loved him. Sundays he 'usta take me to the games in Forbes Field and we went fishin' once. When he walked out, the world sort of ended for me. Then a funny thing happened when I was about twelve. I 'usta take long rides on the bus, and get out wherever I wanted, and walk around. Then, one morning, and I never forgot it, I seen my Pop walkin' on the street. I got off the bus. I think he saw me but I never knew for sure. Anyway, he seemed to see me, but didn't say nothin'. I followed him into a hotel, and stood around for hours in the lobby until some bellboy threw me out. Pop, he never came out. I never said nothin' to Ma or Milly because I didn't want to upset them. But I never got over it. It still hurts. And do you know, to this day I don't know why he left and what ever became of him.

*Musician, twenty-eight, Los Angeles:*

I was twelve, and graduating from private school. My father flew in from Boston. I wore my cap and gown when I went to the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City to pick him up for the ceremony. When I walked into the room, there

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was a fat broad there in a slip putting clothes into a bag. It was like something out of *Death of a Salesman*. "This is my boy," he said. "Hi, kid," she said. I felt like a prize moron. I hated him for it, and I wanted to smash him and her in the face. I was crushed, too. I didn't know where to look. I'm sixteen years older now, and I think I'm pretty hip. If he wanted to swing, fine. He was divorced—and free. But not in front of me.

"My children will have to understand that I want happiness."

*This woman is thirty-one, has four children, and is neither legally separated nor divorced from her husband. They live in Miami, Florida.*

Five years ago my husband moved out. We were married before we were eighteen, but as we lived together his personal problems began to overwhelm him. What he needs is deep therapy. He needs help desperately. He feels that he has to be alone. Yet he is constantly drawn to me. He drops by whenever he wants to, sleeps overnight, but cannot decide to stay or go for good. Our children are deeply puzzled. When he left he said nothing to the children. He left me with a tremendous burden, and I resented it very much. Two years ago he returned for a month, and then left again. Before he did, he called my four daughters, six, eight, nine, and twelve into the bedroom, and told them that he had to go away again, and that this was "between mother and me." Miriam, who was seven and a half then spoke up. "Is it be-

cause I am a bad girl?" And she has repeatedly said similar things, like, "Is he punishing me when I am bad?" My answers are usually that this entire thing is between their father and myself, that he is not well. I think she is beginning to understand. She did tell my father, "Mommy and Daddy love each other, but they can't get along." And certainly the fact that he is welcomed in this house, and has the freedom of the house, has come here often on weekends and holidays, and so forth, has brought them a great deal of reassurance that they haven't lost their father, that he actually cares for them.

Ours is a fantastically complicated situation. I am now thinking of divorce. I want a real husband to care for my children. I believe that if parents make a happy life for themselves, the children will be better off. My eldest, Donna, is beginning to see what I mean. I remember when she went to camp several years ago. She met a girl whose parents had divorced, and the mother had remarried. That was her first contact with divorce, and she saw a happy situation there, and she saw that it isn't always wretched. There were other friends where the father had married twice and she saw happy situations there. And Donna's best girl friend's parents are separated.

If I were a happy, contented woman now, whether I had a husband or not, with a life and a job, then I could give my children what they need. If you are secure, if you are happy, they will be. They will accept, even though they resent. When I told Miriam that we might have to end up in divorce, she said she didn't want to tell anybody because her friends would tease her. She didn't want anybody to know. And she's ashamed of the fact—didn't tell anybody.

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My husband is neither a good husband nor a good father. But I never criticize him before the children. For example, I didn't say anything about our separation to my mother until my husband actually left the house. When I told her, she saw my husband as she had always seen my father. All the bad feeling she had had against my father she felt suddenly toward my husband, and came out with so much hate. And she told me all the bad things she felt about my father—how rotten he was. This was very unnecessary to me at the time. But she started to make some derogatory remarks about my husband in front of the children and I immediately told her that she was not to—that he was the children's father, and this was none of their business and none of her business.

My parents had their problems, and once my father left, just for one night. I was eleven and a half, but I shall never forget the terrible feeling of losing one's father, and I can sympathize with and understand my children in what they feel about the loss of their father. They do feel it. And basically I need my husband's help in bringing them up, and as long as there is an open door for him, he will be with them more, and he will take them out more. He took them for weekends wherever he could to relieve me of the physical strain of having to care for them all the time, and also to give me a little free time to socialize. So there is an advantage in not treating my husband as a monster. The children need their father, and basically he does love them. He has problems, but they don't have to know it. They will realize it when they grow up. He does the best he can with whatever his limitations are.

Once I visited my cousins in New York City, and at-

tended a "Parents Without Partners" round table discussion. I was appalled at the hatred each partner had for the other, and how they had all used the children to get back at each other. This is just wretched. I was happy enough to say that we have never used the children in that way. We have been sane enough to hurt each other, but not our children.

A few years ago I started to go out with other men. I did not hide this from my daughters or my husband. When one of the children told him, he was absolutely furious at me. He felt that I was trying to hurt him by leaving phone numbers and names about the house. My feeling was that I had nothing to hide from the children, inasmuch as I was not ashamed of it.

A friend of mine, who is divorcing her husband, says she has two daughters, twelve and thirteen and a half—and she tells them *what* she goes out with, talks to them very frankly, and the children share her experience vicariously. They understand that she has a need for friends, and this is how it must be. They are big enough to understand that Mother needs a life of her own.

To an extent I feel that I have made mistakes, but I couldn't help myself at the time. It was really in allowing them to see my unhappiness and frustrations and in taking things out on them. Yelling too much. In some ways there are times I feel that they owe me the understanding that I don't get from my husband. Sometimes, I'm sick or overwhelmed by things, and they should understand. I expect them to understand, which, I suppose, is wrong. I have made a mistake in not teaching them more responsibility and expecting more of them than they give. I think they are capable of it. But I have been unhappy and have had few satisfactions

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in years, and I need to be loved in order to give love. If I decide to divorce my husband, I hope to make my children see that it is for their benefit as well. I, too, have a right to be happy. I anticipate some trouble from my older daughters, but if we have to face it, we shall. First I will break finally with my husband. Then I expect to date. Then, perhaps, marry. My children will have to understand that I want happiness.

*Here is a group of people, all single parents, who are trying to come to grips with their problems and those of their children in an actual group therapy session in the Philadelphia vicinity. The moderator is a psychiatrist specializing in this kind of treatment.*

*Vivian:* I had always tried to avoid any scenes or arguments or any kind of emotional disturbances between my husband and myself in the presence of Peggy, because my mother and father used to quarrel a lot when I was a small girl. My parents were divorced, and I always remember the fights they had, and it left a terrible impression on me. So, when I found that things weren't going smoothly between Harry and me, I did everything that was possible not to have any scenes in front of her. You see, I wanted things to go smoothly in her company—not to have any fights. My father once smacked my mother, and she threw something at him, and I remember blood all over the kitchen table. Once the neighbors had to call the cops, and they nearly took me away for the night, but my parents began to cry and beg the police, and promised to make up and all that.

The truce lasted about a week. All those lousy memories I wanted to avoid, even though I hold no grudge against my parents. They just couldn't seem to get along.

As for me, however, keeping all my resentment in was a terrible burden, especially since the marriage was becoming a repeat of my folks' marriage. I often appeased Harry. But nothing seemed to make him want to stay married to me.

We were divorced in 1959 on grounds of desertion. Actually, he had moved away, and taken up with another woman. Peggy, who was seven at the time, never asked me the cause of the divorce, and I didn't say anything to her. Maybe she asked Harry, but I wouldn't know. Maybe someday I'll ask him, just for the sake of curiosity. But in all, my daughter's relationship with her father has been pretty good, both before and after the divorce. She really misses him.

After the divorce, Peggy and I moved down here to live with my father. The irony of ironies, incidentally, was when Harry's business sent him down here too, the same year. Anyway, living with my father was a terrible setup for Peggy, because he handled her very poorly. He constantly interfered. I had to go to business, and she pined for her father continually. I found that the situation of living with my father in a two-room apartment was terrible. When Harry remarried, about nine months later, a friend suggested that Peggy might do better being with her father and her step-mother than with my father and me. I accepted his suggestion, and Peggy went to live with her father. Until, that is, Charlotte, that's his second wife, began to object to her living with them, and they put Peggy in a boarding school. But up to the age of six, Peggy's relationship with her father was very good, and now, of course, she calls him

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quite often, he calls her, and they have a fairly good relationship. I mean, I never talk against him, because my mother did that about my father and his family, and I know the effect it had on me. I don't say I praise my husband, but I never try to make her negative against him because I know how important it is for her to identify herself positively with her father. She doesn't confide in me about her feelings about my husband, but I do remember that she did suggest once that she'd like me to go back to him. You know, as though that were her ideal wish.

*Psychiatrist:* Now, Vivian, what you've been saying is hardly unique. You really were too gracious in your married life, too interested in leaning over backward in your desire to avoid fights with your husband. Let's face it, you didn't get a divorce because of your graciousness and sweetness. Your divorce grew out of a complete breakdown of communication. And I want to stress that very, very much to all of you here. A failure to know how to communicate deadens and even kills the marital relationship. Now, let's note the interesting thing here in Vivian's situation. Her little girl, Peggy, is being constantly thrown into a pattern of not being wanted. From parents to Mother to Grandfather to Father and Step-mother, to private boarding school and back to Mother. Good grief! What child would be immune to that treatment? Rejected at every turn. And her father. All she has is telephone contact. Is it any wonder that she may drift off into a world of fantasy? Or perhaps, anger?

When she returned to you, Vivian, she was jealous of her mother's relationship to her own father, jealous of her step-



mother's relationship to her own father. It's a pretty hard tussle to take in a twelve-year-old's life.

*Vivian:* Why should she be jealous of my relationship with my own father?

*Psychiatrist:* With your own father? Because, after all, she was not the one and only. You are the one and only to your father since you're his daughter. And as she couldn't be a very special person here, and also to her father after his remarriage, she now found herself confronted with a step-mother who didn't even want her around. Even Harry, her apparently doting father, agreed to send her off to boarding school. What you have to recognize, Vivian, is that this is the time to help her, really to lend her a hand and allow her eventually to make her own life, even if it isn't in agreement with yours. Maybe when she's older she will be able to work out a more successful view of life than you or Harry have.

*Vivian:* Oh, I don't say she can't. But I would have stayed married to Harry for Peggy's sake.

*Psychiatrist:* I don't think anyone should stay married to anybody for the sake of the child, and I don't think that it happens too often. In every person who stays married for the sake of the child is a child, himself or herself, who needs the protection of a mate as a mother or father figure. That's why they stay married. I see so many divorces the first five years, and so many divorces after the twentieth year. The first five years there is a great deal of dependence and fear, but the twentieth year is usually the time when men and women are able to overcome their adolescence and become

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adults and they—of course it is on a neurotic basis—they take the chance of getting free. That is what we called “delayed adolescence.”

*Marian:* My husband and I split up when my child was less than a year old. We never saw him again, but I did hear about him from relatives from time to time. My trouble now stems from my daughter. She wants to see her father. She wants to meet him. She met one of his nephews at a party, and he told her the story.

*Psychiatrist:* I don't quite understand the problem here.

*Marian:* It's that she no longer trusts me, refuses to confide in me. You see, all along I had told her he was dead. She didn't know about the desertion or divorce. She was about six or seven when she said to me, one day, “My daddy's dead, isn't he?” So I said, “Yes.” And she said, “Where's my Daddy?” I answered, “He died in a hospital a long time ago.” She accepted that for a while. Then she said, later, “My Daddy's dead,” and that was when I should have told her the truth, but I let her continue to believe that he was dead. I had a friend who took me aside once and said, “You know, you ought to tell your daughter.” And I said, “Oh, she doesn't understand. I'll just let her think that he's dead,” but that was my mistake. I should have listened to my friend, and gone for professional help.

*Psychiatrist:* I've told this group time after time that the basic problem in divorce is that the adults find themselves unable to subordinate their interests to the children's. Vivian, and you, too, Marian—I only wish that you had sought professional help before you sent Peggy to her father

or told Barbara that her father was dead. Instead, you allowed passions and hates and fears to lead you off. And professional help doesn't mean only psychiatric assistance. It might've been a sympathetic pastor or a family doctor with some psychological training. But now your children believe that there is something wrong. "What's wrong with me when no one wants me?" Or, "Why did she lie about the desertion?" And things of that nature.

Children must be allowed to believe in their parents. At best they should be reassured constantly when a divorce or separation is in the works. At worst, let us hope that one of the parents will give a little thought to their frightened youngsters.

We can't all be perfect, obviously, but your problem now is well beyond the question of perfection. Your mistakes have been made. They weren't deliberate, and perhaps part of them may be undone. Your job now is to allow yourself to love your children selflessly. Remember, many children of broken homes turn out to have perfectly normal and happy married lives.

## *The Handicapped and the Sick*

A recently published book written by handicapped people leaves a searing impression on the reader of the shattering burden that both parents and child must bear.\* To the normal difficulties of growing up, add a cleft palate, a clubfoot, a retarded child, perhaps no legs. Can the outside world comprehend the impact and the struggle? Anxiety, guilt, fear, shame and the like crisscross one another. What precisely does it mean to a little boy when you tell him that his sister is going away to the hospital, never to return, or that a father needs hospitalization because of severe schizophrenia? And the crippled and sick themselves? They desperately need, the journalist Dorothy Barclay tells us, a warm heart, assistance, sympathetic understanding and, above all, the right to undergo normal experiences "to see the sights and hear the sounds of the world; to mingle with others . . . to have their outgoingness accepted; their strengths developed; their lacks compensated."

## MENTAL ILLNESS

*Engineer, thirty-nine, New Rochelle, New York.*

My mother-in-law came and stayed with us while Corinne was recovering from her nervous breakdown. She was wonderful for the kids. One thing I noticed she did quite naturally was remind them of the wonderful qualities of their mother, and of all the good times that all of us had together in the past. This eased the burden, and helped the kids look forward to better times.

*Housewife, forty-two, Chicago:*

Just before he had to be taken to the hospital, Marty got very irrational. He would have these black moods, and literally scream at the kids. He would rant at them for watching television, claiming that spies were sending out messages against him in the cartoons. Of course, this frightened the children terribly. But, you know, I was able to use even that constructively when Marty was in the hospital. It gave them a stake in their daddy's getting better. I told them that his feelings were sick, and that was what was making him act so strange and mean. When the doctors fixed his feelings, then he would be the old daddy we knew and loved. This was something the children could understand.

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*Housewife, thirty-three, Queens, New York:*

My little six-year-old Fred's behavior changed dramatically after Don went to the psychiatric hospital. He became good as gold. *Too* good. No temper, no shrieks, no tantrums. Very quiet. I asked my pediatrician about it, and what he told me made sense. Fred, he said, had seen his daddy taken away to the hospital after acting strangely . . . yelling and all that. Now Fred thought the same thing would happen to him if he dared to act up. He was scared. Kids are like that.

"... I decided not to say anything. . . ."

*"We were married nearly fourteen years when Phil started to change." The speaker is a thirty-seven-year-old mother of four, a Baltimore housewife, and a high school graduate. Her husband is a real estate broker who also sells insurance. He attended night college for two years, and studied accounting and insurance.*

It's hard to say when he really started acting differently. When the kids would start yelling and screaming, he didn't have any patience any more. And if you had known Phil, you would know he was always a good and gentle father. He suddenly began screaming and throwing things at the bedroom wall. Or he'd cry a lot—all the time, when things would get too tough on the job or money problems too much sometimes. Then he started giving up on making love at night, and instead would take walks alone. This would go

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on for days, and then, suddenly, it would stop, and he would go back to being his own self. And I'd think it was just a mood. But it wasn't, because it would start all over again. Nervous, forgetting everything, angry at me and the kids and my brothers. Then one day he said that his boss was picking on him. And so it would go on, with the normal mixed in with the abnormal.

All this time our family was more and more upset. I thought that the kids would go crazy. They couldn't reach him for anything except when he was back to normal. It got so bad that one night while we were in bed he started to talk about his work, what he wanted to do for all of us if he ever got his own agency. But then he started on the persecution angle, about how they all hated him on the job. From that he went on to me, how I hated him too, and carried on with other men, and things like that. Then he grabbed me and started punching me and choking me and I was afraid to scream because the kids' rooms were nearby. He nearly killed me. He's strong. And then he started to cry again. And apologize. And beg me to forgive him. And then, and only then, did I suspect that Phil was a sick man.

I told him that unless he saw a doctor, I was going to walk out on him with the kids. I never thought it would come to that, but I didn't really know how sick he was, and how much he needed my help. He did go to the family doctor, who referred him to a psychiatrist, and Phil was finally hospitalized.

Once he was in there, I was faced with the kids. Should I or shouldn't I tell them what had happened to their father? Only my brothers and their wives knew about it, and they

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were no help. They still equated mental sickness with being crazy; they still thought it some sort of sin. Yet, I suppose I felt the same way until Phil was sick. You know, I never knew anyone who was ever mentally sick before.

So I decided not to say anything, really. I told all of them—they're twelve, ten, nine and five—that their father was sick in the hospital with bad headaches, and was very nervous, and as soon as he was fixed up he'd be allowed to return. I think that worked on my youngest one, but I don't know about the other three. I was afraid to take them to the hospital every Saturday and Sunday because I didn't want to expose them to all those sick people. My daughter, the twelve-year-old, has become my special friend who listens to me pour my heart out. And I'm terrified that someone will one day tell my kids that Phil was in a "crazy house." I hope I did the right thing. Maybe I should have told them. I just did what I thought right.

### MENTAL RETARDATION

"They urged us to put him away."

*"I am a housewife and have three children, one of whom is a mentally retarded nineteen-year-old boy. I live in a Washington, D.C., suburb."*

I come from a family of six girls. My mother was one of many girls, and my father was the only boy among four girls. So when my first baby, a boy, was born, we were all elated. Just before I came home from the hospital the doctor



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called and asked to speak to my mother. He said candidly and even brutally that my mother should tell me the baby had died. The child wasn't normal, he said, and he doubted if it would survive its twelfth year. I didn't find that out until four months later. I was planning to visit my sister in Vermont, and I called the same doctor and asked if I ought to bring Alan, the baby, for a check-up during the summer. And he just shouted into the phone, "What do you mean, should you bring him in? You don't have a normal baby. You just don't go off and go away and do such things." That's how I learned Alan was mentally retarded.

I did go for expert advice. We spent a fortune hunting down eminent specialists, psychologists, and psychiatrists. Now we have a terrific prejudice against them in general. Many parents of the retarded and handicapped do. I think that in spite of them we managed to keep our youngster home and fight this thing out. They told us that as other, more normal children came along, Alan would disrupt the family. That he would break us all up, and exhaust our emotional energies. They urged us to put him away. Well, we adjusted and our two others, both girls, are happy, bright youngsters who both love Alan. And he adores them.

He has about a 50 IQ, and has always had patience and perseverance. He has his own defense mechanisms. I often asked my doctors whether there was a time when you say to your child, "You are a retarded child." I work with a retarded association group, and one time we sponsored a show on local television. It was well into the evening, and Alan sat patiently by until he spoke up. "I want my own TV program," he said, "not one about you and the kids you're helping."

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Another time we were shoveling snow here one winter, and Alan was eleven, Jean nine, and Helen was going to be eight. There had been quite a storm, and we were all out there shoveling. Alan hates the wintertime, and basically he would like to take life very easy. So he decided to go off with, "I can't shovel snow any longer."

He is a big boy, built nicely. His coordination is a little shaky, but he rides a two-wheeler. It took him time, but he does. He is also a good-looking boy. But he started giving us a whole lecture on why he couldn't stay out there. You know, he said, some children are one way, and some children are another. Some children can do certain things, and some can't. "And I just can't be out here."

My husband and I said, "You're right. You are 100 per-cent right, except for one thing: you are using this as an excuse to get out of something you can do. There are certain things that you cannot do, and you can use that as an excuse. But this you *can* do." And he did.

Many parents overtest their children. This is a chronic ailment of parents of retarded youngsters. They just go around, looking for someone who will tell them this is not so, that there exists a miraculous cure, or that the original diagnosis was wrong. We did too. And we never found such a person. But we did find incompetents who paraded behind their degrees to pass categorical judgments based upon mere generalizations.

For example, we once took Alan to an internationally known hospital where they tested the child. We had gotten up at six o'clock, traveled for several hours, and we were all exhausted, especially me, since I was in my eighth month of pregnancy.

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I watched Alan undergo various tests, I saw how he reacted, and I was even allowed to observe him from behind a screen. At the end I was interviewed as well, and then the doctor called us in for his conclusions. "Send the child away to an institution," he told us. He said Alan had deep-rooted frustrations that could possibly turn him into a killer, what with a new baby coming into the house. He warned that if we kept the new baby in the house without a lock on its door we were risking a tragedy.

My husband and I could hardly believe the doctor was talking about the same child, our lovable, gentle Alan, a child who still showed every indication of a happy personality even after getting up at six o'clock in the morning and riding all the way up there and being tested the same day. According to this doctor, this could not be. The child was supposed to have too many theoretical frustrations. As we left, somewhat in a bit of shock, the doctor also told us that Alan would never speak, at least not more than a few disjointed words. He was wrong on every count.

But my husband and I were also wrong. We overestimated Alan's reception among other, more normal children, as well as adults. He is a warm, sociable boy—always has been—and people seemed to take to him naturally, not out of any misdirected compassion. We were wrong.

We had sent him out to regular school in the primary grades. One day, about ten years ago, I watched him returning from the school. He was walking up the hill backwards, facing a group of children. I always let him come and go alone, because he wanted to act like a big boy. Yet I noticed each day he was taking a little bit longer. Well, on that day a neighbor phoned and said, "I saw Alan walking sort of

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backwards, as though the children were lined up against him." I ran down the block, and I saw that it was true. There he was, against the wall, with a bunch of kids from the school just tormenting him with, "Crazy, crazy," or "come on, let's see you laugh and crawl on the floor," and horrible things of that type. I saw red. Alan was absolutely bewildered—not angry, but bewildered. As the kids saw me racing down onto them they started to run away, and I think I picked up two kids, one on each arm without having their feet touch the ground. Hair flying, I must have looked like a witch. I let the two go, and took my Alan home.

You know the only thing he said to me in his halting, broken speech? He said, in a hurt and confused voice, "Mommy, I never made fun of Johnny." Johnny, you see, was a crippled child Alan had once met at a school for crippled and retarded children. He had had meningitis, and wore braces from the armpits down, and had to be taught to walk again. His body was all contorted, and it was pitiful to see him try to walk. That was my Alan's response to the cruelty of the children—that he had never teased Johnny. Whenever I think of it, my eyes fill up.

Well, I explained to Alan that sometimes children just don't understand these things, especially if they don't have a handicap themselves. And he seemed to accept this. But, of course, his sister Jean was quite upset by this whole thing. I explained to her that it was really not the children's fault. That their mommies and daddies hadn't explained to them that we are all born differently. When Alan was born, I said, his muscles were not working right—the muscles of his tongue and his body and his brain. Children can under-

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stand something like this. Muscle is a concept they can comprehend.

Apparently, things have worked out well with our normal children in their relationship to Alan. One time, for example, we had watched a television telethon about an extremely retarded youngster and his family. Jean must have been eight at the time. In the film the family had to rent a basement apartment where there were no stairs and which had a locked gate to protect this child. The program suggested that the film child belonged in an institution with his own kind, while his normal brothers and sisters ought to be allowed to live a normal life. To all this Jean said, turning to me, "Aren't we extremely lucky that Alan wasn't born that badly?"

"There is nothing to be ashamed of. . . ."

*"Most people misunderstand the entire world of the retarded child, in fact, they don't even know what retardation involves." This speaker is a professional journalist who has made the subject one of her specialties.*

A retarded child is one who cannot ever grow to be mentally alert, and he cannot ever learn much. He has a very limited level—he'll never become a real adult mentally—but he is usually quite normal emotionally unless the life he lives as a retarded child makes him abnormal because of all the pressures on him and the way society treats him. Basically there is no connection, and that is what I want to make clear, because people get those two things mixed up.

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It is just a physical thing where the brain is not able to develop to its full potential. Retarded children look perfectly normal unless they happen to be, for example, Mongoloids. Now Mongoloid children happen to be very, very sweet and gentle, but sometimes they frighten youngsters who have had no experience with these things, and whose parents themselves aren't prepared for the experience.

In general, many people explain retardation to children in this way: Some children have polio when they are small, and they can't use their legs quite the same way as most can. Other children have had some other illness. Some children have blue eyes, some children have green eyes. This is just what happens. Obviously those children who look different had some slight accident when they were born or just before they were born. And that's what causes them to look a little different. I think if one just blames it on a specific accident, it is the easiest way, and then say that, apart from this accident, the children are normal. These unfortunates are like little babies, that is, their minds are best described in that way depending upon their mental development. An eight-year-old might behave like a four-year-old. I remember once when a normal group of children taunted a retarded eight-year-old with cries of "Dopey." The mother was furious as well as badly shaken, but she screwed up her courage and self-control and went out to lecture those kids that her son's trouble was not his fault, that it wasn't as if he weren't trying. It was, she told them, a physical accident, as if they were making fun of a child who could not see. Those kids left him alone after that incident, but as the woman told me about it I couldn't help pitying all the less articulate mothers

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and their pitiful, broken children who live out lives of insults and blows because of their curse.

I also know of two families with both retarded and normal children in each household. They explain retardation to their normal children in different manners. One describes it as "God's will, and His way is inscrutable." The second deals with it as I would, namely, that it was an accident, a great shame that Johnny will never be able to develop fully. It happens all over the world to many parents, and we only hope that eventually scientific workers will uncover the cause of retardation. But meanwhile, Johnny is a small child who will never become a full adult. Remember, I stressed the word "accident," because some children may even fear that they will turn into a retarded child, which, of course, is highly improbable.

In any event, if a family decides to keep a retarded child at home, they had better be prepared to give that child a good deal of tender, loving care. If there are normal children at home as well, then life must go on as usual. There is nothing to be ashamed of, and it is not usually hereditary. Friends and relatives should be invited to the home. I know of a number of homes where the retarded child is even included in the play and games of the normal children.

I think that about the most difficult thing that can happen to any couple is to have retarded children. When I begin to think about it, I get a cold chill. In so many marriages this has led to divorce or terrible tension, let alone guilt and anxiety. Parents' organizations such as the Association for the Help of Retarded Children do great things. They help the parents. It's a sort of group activity where they come

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together, and realize that they aren't alone in having this problem. They set up schools, summer camps, and have access to the finest medical information on the subject. They compare notes, have special speech training, social groups for the older children, and the like.

### SICKNESS

*Father, thirty-four, Boston, Massachusetts:*

I was in the hospital for three weeks with ulcerative colitis. My seven-year-old didn't see me in all that time, and we talked only once or twice on the phone. A few days after I got back home, he told me about a dream he had. I was in the house at night, Daddy, he said. A big man was trying to get in. He smashed his hand through the glass at the top of the door. Then I saw his hand reach in to turn the knob open. It was all hairy. He came inside and began to chase me. I yelled, "Daddy, Daddy, help!" But you weren't around. I couldn't find you. I was left alone. Suddenly, ~~with~~ without knowing why or how, I understood this dream was my little boy's way of telling me how frightened he had been about my stay at the hospital. Just like that, I said to him, "Stephen, I guess that's how scared you felt about me being sick." He broke out into the widest grin, and nodded his head up and down. And we hugged. I don't think a parent who's sick can reassure a child enough that no matter *what*, the child will still be loved and taken care of, that *his* world will remain secure.



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*Eight-year-old boy:*

I went to the hospital. I had my tonsils out. They showed me a picture of a football player. They said, "Do you want to be like him?" And I said, "Yes." Then they said to take a deep breath and blow up the football. I took a deep breath, and went to sleep. When I woke up, my mommy asked me what I wanted. I told her Chinese food.

*Seven-year-old girl:*

Mommy, Daddy, and I went to Europe. I had to have shots. Ugh! Mommy said they would hurt a lot, and they did. She said was it worth it to go on a nice trip in a jet plane? You bet it was!

*Mother, forty, Brooklyn, New York:*

My daughter cut her hand very, very badly when she was about six years old, and had many stitches in it. We went to the doctor at the time when the stitches were to be taken out, and the nurse said to my daughter, "Now you are a big girl, and you don't need to cry." The doctor turned to the nurse in great anger, and said: "She is not a big girl. She is a little girl, and she may need to cry." I said to the pediatrician later, "I was glad I chose you in the first place. Now I'm even gladder. What made you say that?" And the pediatrician said: "When I was an intern I used that business

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myself of trying to encourage children to be very stoic, not to express their feelings, be controlled and very courageous and staunch about pain and so forth. Once I said this to a young boy of about six or seven, whereupon he turned around and vomited all over me. You see, it is better to let a kid cry than to have him vomit." So my pediatrician and I laughed over this story, but aside from the humor, the implication, I think, is the fact that crying in childhood and even in adulthood is an emotional response to fear or all kinds of feelings, and a necessary response. It is a physical expression of something that needs to be felt, and I think we as parents should be able to say, "You are little. You may cry. I understand, and I will try to help you get through this painful experience."

"The hardest thing for me . . . is the incurable case."

*A pediatrician of some twenty years experience in a large Massachusettes suburb:*

Pain, sickness, -operations, hospitals are all cut from one piece. You must understand that children five years of age have already experienced pain in one form or another. They have fallen. An object has dropped on them. And so on. I think what's most important about pain is a combination of factors. In the first place, there is the objective factor of what is the stimulus that creates pain, and, secondly, how an individual perceives pain. Let me give you an example. A golf ball dropping on a foot, for instance, or a metal ball

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dropping on the foot, obviously will inflict greater pain in one case than in the other. On the other hand, one can witness a child falling down and scraping his knee on the sidewalk during a game of ball, and very excitedly getting up and running, not paying any attention to the bleeding or scraped knee. That same child is observed by the mother, and she rushes over, picks up the child and looks at it, exclaiming, "Oh, you have a boo-boo," or words to that effect, and smothers the child with kisses and love and so on. Then the child realizes he is hurt and reacts to the pain. So there are two things at least insofar as pain is concerned: one is the original stimulus, and the second is how the individual perceives it.

I think that a healthy attitude, of course, is to let the child perceive pain as he ordinarily would without the anxieties of the parents being imposed on top of it. Take a child, for instance, who is going to the hospital or coming to the doctor's office, and is going to have an injection. This is something that happens every day in a pediatric office. The parent very frequently should not hold the child while he is being given an injection. I see no reason why the child should suffer pain while in the arms of the parent. The nurse or the doctor should help immobilize him, if necessary. But those children who are brought to the office prepared for the injection are going to approach this thing with tremendous anxiety. For the most part they understand that it is a little prick. It is over in a split second. Let them cry; let them holler. It's all done with. But yet when the parent—it is usually the mother I think—really smothers the child with, "Oh, this won't hurt you a bit," and makes a painful situation out of something such as an examination which is totally

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painless, it just reflects her own feelings about it, and transmits these things to a child, causing unnecessary anxiety.

It has often been observed that a soldier in the heat of battle might have a gunshot wound, a shrapnel wound, without even recognizing the fact that he has been injured, and will want to continue fighting suffering pain only when he looks down at the place that is injured. How often have people gone skiing, for instance, and tripped and broken a bone, usually a small bone in the ankle, and not until they got home noticed that the foot is swollen, that it begins to throb and hurt. The same is true of children. By and large, they can tolerate a great deal of pain, and I think they can be made to understand that a certain amount of it is part of growing up, a natural thing, and life without pain in itself is a definite medical disease. People born without receptors for pain can be in very dangerous situations. Pain can be a warning. You touch a hot stove and you back away, and you don't touch it again.

Again we come back to the concept, "The doctor won't hurt you." There is no sense in saying "the doctor won't hurt you" because as soon as you say that, it may convince the child that he will be hurt, after all. On the other hand it may be a deliberate lie. Or a parent may bribe the child to come into the office, promising that he isn't going to get an injection, knowing that he may very well get one. I, for one, don't give children injections if the parents have already promised that I wouldn't. I am not going to make a liar out of the parents, because by doing so I create in the child a fear of what goes on. They are being fooled. They are not being told the truth. Parents, in their own ignorance about what happens in the sick body, will often make statements

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that will inadvertently cast the doctor in the role of the evil one, when all he is trying to do is to help them overcome an infection or whatever it is that happens to be bothering them. This is the thing that I see most often in a pediatric office.

Of course there are other difficulties too, because the way the child behaves in an office is not necessarily the way he behaves at home or in other situations. The office can be a threatening experience. I don't think it necessarily has to be. It is a matter of approach, for one, and what the past experiences of the patient have been. But perhaps I am being a little bit too hard on parents in expecting them to know as much about disease as the doctor does. They don't, of course.

Then again, we have the hospital business. Sometimes it's easy, other times not, in explaining what's about to happen. I remember one horrible experience a colleague told me about concerning a patient, a five-year-old girl, in for a tonsillectomy. He had advised the parents to tell the child exactly what I would. They added that the hospital people were nice people. And, of course, the child believed her parents. As it turned out, the hospital staff—interns, nurses, orderlies, doctors, the whole lot of them—were perfectly miserable people to a little five-year-old girl. Green jackets and trousers worn by the interns and brusque behavior toward mother and child terrified the child. She still has nightmares about hospitals, more than a year after, and all because no one on the staff cared enough to care about a little girl.

Ordinarily, however, it's easy enough to explain a tonsillectomy without frightening a child, and the hospital experience need not be an ordeal.

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You explain that the child is going to go to a hospital. He is going to sleep overnight. There are going to be nurses and doctors. He will go off to sleep, and when he wakes up he will have a sore throat. He will not feel the operation. To a child, it's probably some sort of mystery. After all, what does a child of five to twelve know about an operation unless he's actually had one performed on him? One must tell children—but only if they ask—that it is a removal of a piece of tissue that is infected. This is a simple concept that they can understand. You can explain to them, for instance, that each time they've had sore throats the doctor has come to the house, and treated them with medicine for it, and we now have decided to take out the cause of it so that now they won't have as many sore throats. They have to have an operation, they have to go to the hospital, the parents will be with them, they are in the room, the children sleep overnight and the next morning they go home. They will have ice cream and all kinds of things that they like to drink. In a certain amount of detail compatible with the age of the child, one can describe exactly what goes on, because all of us, including children, are curious about what goes on inside the body. This develops, of course, with maturation. Children, like adults, want to know what goes on. I think they can be reassured that if they are going to be hurt, it is only going to hurt a little bit, and after whatever it is that is being done is stopped, it won't hurt any more. They will feel better, they'll go home, and they won't have sore throats or whatever the ailment happens to be.

Unfortunately, at times there is afterpain associated with an operation. But this can be controlled medically, and I think the healthy child very rapidly learns to tolerate a great

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deal of pain, and more or less pretends that it isn't even there. Children who walk around with bandages on following operations, those who have had an intestinal obstruction that required resecting a large portion of their intestine, may have pain, but most of them do not complain about it, and tolerate it very well. If one takes the attitude that they are getting better now, greets them happy and smiling, and doesn't hover over these children with the worried face, then this is a very important part of their recovery in the postoperative period. I think that they should be told that there will be a certain amount of hurt. Perhaps the word "pain" is too much. But it may hurt a little bit. I don't think it is necessary to describe what type of pain—sticking, pulling, or what have you, and I don't think it is necessary to go into a great deal of detail except for much older children who would prefer more information.

Many, many children, even younger ones, look upon going to the hospital as an excursion. I have often heard children say they want to go to the hospital and have their tonsils out because Johnny Jones did. Some children look upon this as an adventure, and it can be handled very easily and very nicely and very gracefully. There are some situations that are different, unfortunately, when something unforeseen happens, and the child has to be subjected to many, many procedures—needling, blood drawing, immobilization, and things of that sort. This is naturally very difficult for the child, but by spending time with them, playing games with them, even when they are immobilized, you'd be surprised at how well they react and how much they try to cooperate with the doctor and the nurses in making themselves better.

Pain is not a big problem with children—it is a problem

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with the parents of children. It often begins when the parents bring the children into the office. Just as an example, "This isn't going to hurt," says Mother, but it hurts. There is no sense in lying to children. It stings a little bit when they get an injection, but if parents start preparing a child three weeks ahead of time, tremendous anxieties build up. The child arrives at the doctor's office or the hospital tense and frightened.

If you have hit your thumb with a hammer, and instead of becoming tense and swearing, you can relax the extremities, and mentally almost isolate the part that hurts from the rest of your body, you have given the cure a good start. Many people seem to be able to do this to some degree, and their pain will lessen. But parents who overemphasize pain from their own anxieties only hurt their children.

The hardest thing for me personally and professionally is the incurable case. Try as I may, I cannot reconcile God's justice with this injustice. Still, I have to keep my personal feelings from the parents. And that is hard, but vital.

I treat a number of children who have diseases which will end their lives. An obvious example is leukemia. The child doesn't know that he is going to die of it; all he knows is that he is taking medicine. Fortunately we can make this disease relatively comfortable for them nowadays. The parents are advised that the child is going to die. They know he is going to die, and they know where we stand in our current state of knowledge about leukemia. We can't cure it—we can only prolong life a little bit. We can help the victims for a while, but when they get worse, and the medicines that we have lose their usefulness, they die. We tell the parents that it is our function to keep the children comfortable—to keep them going as long as we can, because



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maybe tomorrow or the next day something will come up that will be able to knock out this disease. We also advise the parents that during periods where the children are in good shape they should be treated as normally as possible. Send them to school, let them play, and let them have contact with things. Don't hover over them as if every breath were the last one. In other words, give the child as much as you can give him.

When the time comes, I think the child should be allowed to die in a hospital, not in the confusion of his home. He should have the privilege of dying in privacy and comfort.

Besides the loss of a child, there are other tragic problems that must be faced by the family. A neighbor of mine had identical twin girls, and at the age of six one of them died. This was a terrible blow—actually she died rather suddenly last summer, and her twin isn't right yet. She still doesn't understand it. At seven, she has no concept of death. All she knows is that her sister is not coming back, and she'll never see her again. But she should be taught that there are other things to look forward to—that life goes on. The concept of death is difficult for a child to grasp, and it is important not to shroud it with mystery, but to explain it as well as possible so that no false hopes are raised. This business of "Gone to visit grandfather" is, I think, a dreadful mistake.

"It is a question of when you tell the truth."

*A professional child psychologist in suburban New York speaks out on handling the young in sickness.*

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I think the problem is: What are the techniques we have learned which seem to help a child live through sickness, hospitalization, and so on, with as much courage as possible? I believe that where a child is helped to handle it on his own terms, he can meet it.

You have to tell the truth. It is a question of when you tell the truth. If a five-year-old is going to the hospital two weeks from now, you don't tell him that far ahead, but you do have to tell the truth, and you have to live with whatever happens. A child may kick and yell—he may even try to run away. My feeling about it is, it is better to live through that because, in the long run, you and the doctor will be trusted. Further, even if it is a difficult thing to live through with a child, one has to be quite direct and quite honest, and say, "Yes, this may be somewhat painful."

The important thing with all young children is that whatever has to be done in a medical sense, the child has to understand that this is something that helps him and makes him stronger. Much of his fear is of having damage done to him in some way, and being weaker and more helpless than he already is. He feels that he is pretty helpless in the world of adults. When they tell him: "This may be painful or uncomfortable, and you are going to feel worse afterwards, but then you will grow strong again," "we want you to grow well and this is something that is going to make you bigger and stronger and more healthy," a solid groundwork is laid. The emphasis is on the child's own strength and capacity for growth, which is reassuring.

You might have to say to your child, "You are little, and you may need to scream and yell, and I am going to hold

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you. I must keep you well, so I must do the things which have to be done to keep you well. I will understand if you can't help yourself, so I will do the controlling for you." This is tremendously reassuring to a child who really wants to cooperate, but knows he might try to run away, because this is the impulse of childhood.

When a parent says; "I'm stronger and I'm older, and I will control you even if you cry, which will be perfectly all right as it is my job to see that you go through with this," the child knows the parent is his ally, not his enemy. I think the doctor or the nurse or the dentist or the parent who says, "You are strong and not to be frightened by this," in a sense becomes the child's enemy. He is against the child. The adult who says, "You are little, and this is going to be hard for you, and I understand that you are going to react the way a child would react," indicates he is on the child's side. They are allies against the thing which has to be done, but they are in it together, which makes a big difference.

There was an apt cartoon a few years ago showing a child in a dentist's office getting into a chair and saying to his mother, "You are always telling me I'm too little for this and too little for that, and all of a sudden I'm a big boy."

The problem of separation from parents in hospitalization is increasingly serious if the child is young. In other words, the younger the child, the greater this business of being separated from the parents, and all one can say about that is that hospitals are beginning to have sense about it. There are more and more hospitals that permit parents to stay with the children so they won't feel deserted. There is more and more training of pediatric nurses for understand-

ing the psychological impact of separation and pain on children. With an older child, certainly with a twelve-year-old, there are enough inner resources and assurances of security that he can live through some pretty bad experiences, and still survive without trauma. One of the big distinctions is that the ten- or eleven- or twelve-year-old can say what he is feeling or thinking. If he is scared, he can talk about it. If he is in pain he can complain about it.

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*Teacher of the handicapped, fifty-one, New York City:*

All education, including rehabilitation, is influenced by the home—not just by the parents, but the siblings, the uncles, the aunts, the dogs and the cats, anyone who has an imprint on the home environment. There is where the real answers to the handicapped come from. One doesn't have to tell a small child to accept his handicap. But many older children ask: "Why must I accept it? What is there that says I must?" A more honest explanation is far more involved, revolving as it does about how the parents may increase their child's lifelong ability to live with the affliction. This includes understanding how to avoid harming the child who is handicapped as well as his brothers and sisters and the adults of the household. Who can really offer the sure hand of advice and not tremble lest it fail to apply to each youngster and his family? You can't really give advice to the parent or the child. You work together through the life of the child, and where a child is involved, it's worth the effort.

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“ . . . it is the parents who have to have their fantasies exorcised. . . .”

*“The most important thing is to be quite frank with handicapped children at their own levels, and explain that they will never be able to play the piano again, or write with the right hand, or whatever the loss happens to be.” The advice comes from a pediatrician with a large practice in a major Southeastern city.*

Of course this isn't strictly true in a great many things. Science has learned how to tame many diseases. Yet I think the most essential point is to stress the positive. If the child is able to accept what he cannot do, then new ways are found for him to do other things. Life is rarely hopeless.

Take the case of hemophilia. It is not too rare a disease, and most people know it as the bleeding sickness of royalty. I get to see a lot of hemophiliacs, and they come from all over the country. And in these situations the children know as much or more about the disease than many doctors. The parents come into a strange hospital where people will work on their children, yet many of the youngsters needn't be told anything. They are really well informed about what is happening. They are knowledgeable about what they may do and what they may not do. They know what the treatment is. They know what to expect. They know they will be in casts. They know that they will get plasma or fresh whole blood transfusions. They know all these things, and they know there will be other hospital visits sooner or later. Too often, it is the parents who have to have their fantasies exorcised.

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**"Why did it have to happen to me?"**

*"If you ask any parent who has ever had a handicapped child what to tell that child, they answer that one with other questions: 'Do you have to tell them?' 'Don't they know?' . . . The speaker is a retired teacher who spent much of her life teaching handicapped youngsters in Philadelphia.*

Normal children react to the handicapped in the way they have been influenced to act by adults, except in the very young years. I have worked with severely handicapped children such as those without hands, without arms, without legs. And I have heard kindergarten and primary schoolers ask the handicapped, "Why don't you have fingers or hands?" The answer is based on a very fundamental, basic philosophy of handling children.

We do not lie. We do not make up stories. We try to avoid the evasive answers, and we always avoid putting children off, the most dangerous thing. It doesn't make any difference whether you are answering a question about sex, or you are answering a question about, "Where's Mommy?" or "Where's Grandma who died?" or anything at all. It is the very same thing in handling a problem that is related to a child's handicap. First you tell the truth. If the child was born that way, we say: "Jimmy was born without an arm. But the doctors are trying to make something for him that is going to work as nearly like an arm, a real arm, as possible."

But that's all. Not, "The doctors are going to give him another arm," although in today's medicine even that is happening. Everything is passé, no matter what you say, in today's science and new medicine. But I know only my own

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experience, and I don't think I will live to see the results of the latest discoveries.

Fortunately you are not going to see much more of the results of polio. I did, from way, way back, and have worked with children and young people and adults for the last forty years. And of course polio was the most crippling disease of all. In that case, too, you tell the truth. To a child afflicted with this illness, you tell whatever you think he can understand. Here, too, remember that there is no difference in the basic fundamentals of understanding the normal child and the handicapped child. What is true for handling a physically normal child is equally true for the handling of a physically handicapped child. You use exactly the same technique according to the understanding of that age. What you tell a child at five is the truth but perhaps not as complete or as detailed as the truth you would tell a ten- or twelve-year-old who has cerebral palsy, and who is intelligent enough to understand where the damage occurred that produced this kind of effect.

When the child is older, the inevitable question comes up: Why did it have to happen to me? I am still very friendly with the parents of a child who is now a successful young adult. He, the son, was born cerebral palsied. I had him in my care when he was four years old. He is now twenty-two. At age four, we started him in the kind of nursery school which I founded. The medical reports and examinations described his condition as "moderately handicapped," and we handled him as moderately handicapped all the way through childhood, because his speech was not involved at all. He was very verbal. A handsome child. Very high intelligence. Most articulate. But his hands and his legs were involved. We still felt it was moderate, until, as the years went on, we realized

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that the spasticity in the legs and the hands was less moderate than we had expected, and as this bright, lovely, attractive boy presented his problems to us, it didn't look so bad. You'd pick him up, and he was responsive. You'd handle him, and you could help him a little, and so the magnitude of the disability never showed until he got older and we saw that his knees were scissoring together more and more, and that he could not shave himself, and had to be dependent on his father even for that.

Long before that time, however, his parents found that there were times when his affliction had to be discussed and explained, particularly when he was a young boy. His mother once told me: "There were times when he began to go out and see other children. It wasn't bad when he was still in the baby carriage, but later when he realized that there were children his age who were already on a bike, he began to ask questions."

"Mommy, why can't I run—why can't I do that?" and she said she was always blocked when her son asked a question like that—didn't know what to say. Then, a little later, she started to say, "Well if you do your exercises as the doctor tells you to do, as the therapist tells you to do, you will too." But that's not how life ended, but how life went on. He did his exercises, but he still couldn't run, and then he said, "But I did do my exercises." Now this basic question, "Why am I like this?" is answered differently, according to the degree of need. We have had children who have been told that if they prayed and went to church, something miraculous would happen. I also had an experience with a young early adolescent—she must have been twelve years old—severely involved in cerebral palsy. She was a daughter of a captain in the



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Navy, and was told by her aunt that if she prayed every day and never missed her prayers, she would be taken to Lourdes in France, and there would be helped. She believed. The professional worker had a very difficult time, because in a case like that you can't interfere.

In a book I once read, a mother was always answering her crippled child's, "Why," like that. There, too, it depends on the background of the family as to how the mother is going to handle it. In this book, the author brought out the idea that the family was chosen by God to bear a cross, because they were able to do it better than anybody else. There, too, it is difficult for the professional to contradict the family.

You simply do not interfere with the parent in such a case. I had a situation once where we had the child of a rabbi, an orthodox rabbi. The mother said to me, "Why should my husband, who is such a saint, have a crippled child; why to my husband, who has been such a wonderful man all his life?" These are the kinds of questions that come up. When you become involved in a case like this, where a child has been reared to believe that God is going to help him, there is little you can do. You work with the parent as well as you can, always giving a realistic picture—how the child is getting along, reemphasizing continually the doctor's prognosis. "This is the situation, but we are trying to perfect the child in this other area where there is a great deal of hope for improvement," and so on and so on. You handle the parent exactly the same way as you do a parent of any other child.

Then there are the children's questions about their futures. I remember one clubfooted little boy telling the class, "I want to be a policeman." Should I have berated that

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darling little six-year-old? Not on your life! So we merely accept the statement, because all little boys want to be policemen and firemen. The place where that question becomes vital is at the age where it is vital. Then it is important. It isn't a question of playing or acting or dramatizing, "I am a policeman," or I am this or that, but at the place where the child has already reached a certain kind of training and education, and where he says, "I want to be an actor," and he has no speech. Or he has poor speech. From the moment that he knows what he is talking about, from the moment that he knows what the function of an actor is, you begin to give the realistic and truthful picture. And you have it come from him. Have you seen an actor? What does an actor do? Does he dance? Does he sing? Does he run? Does he walk? Is he on his own two legs? And have the answer come from him.

If a child has a special talent, you begin to encourage him from very early childhood. If a child has a talent in art, you encourage it. Who knows, with a young child, whether the talent is such that it is going to be useful to him professionally or not? But if it satisfies something within him, and it gives him a meaning in life, use whatever possibilities are available. I know that I have had many patients who said they wanted to be teachers. Well, you can be a teacher if you have the facility within yourself. To function as a teacher, I told them, begin to take stock of what you have and what you haven't.

One of the most serious mistakes that I have seen in families is where the family projects its feelings about the handicapped to the child. I say this very sympathetically. They cannot help themselves. The damage is done in early childhood, when Grandma says, "What have I done to bring this on—that my daughter had such a child?" Can you imagine

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this said in the presence of a child who, they think, doesn't understand what's going on? But they always do. Such a remark might do a great harm to an otherwise physically perfect normal child; can you see what it could do to a child in a wheelchair?

For example, a few years ago I had a very attractive, charming little girl of six or seven, who had polio just before the Salk vaccine came out—one of the last cases. The mother could never get over that. Now where was she, she keeps asking. What did she do? Where did she take the child, and where did she get this germ, as she called it? She could never get over it herself that this child might not have been afflicted if it could only have happened one day later, or if the child had had the inoculation. And there is nothing—nothing—that could have been done in a short time. Working with the mother over a period of years, one could help, but in the meantime this child was living day by day with her mother's agony, and all we could do was give her a wholesome, happy, lovely kind of experience in our school.

One of the things that the mother could not possibly tolerate was the word "crippled." She would bypass it. Use anything at all but the word "crippled," and insist that her child was going to be all right because, you know, she wasn't born that way. She kept emphasizing all the time that the child was not born that way. She wouldn't listen to the doctors who said the legs were severely involved. She never heard when the teachers tried to emphasize to her that Sarah could do lovely things with her hands, although she would not be able to do very much on her legs, such as dancing. She did not *hear* it. This was five years ago.

The child is now in a rehabilitation center, and from

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time to time I hear from her mother. The last time, about Christmas, she wrote me a letter saying, "I remember now you did tell me that Sarah was going to be handicapped seriously. I did not believe you then. I do now." While it's never too late, I suppose, to confront the situation realistically, that mother messed up Sarah's life: she hampered her progress, and prevented the very child she loved so dearly from going ahead.

"I was one of the lucky ones."

*The speaker is clubfooted, he is a pianist, and in his late thirties. He remembers his youth.*

Gee, how I loved baseball. The Dodgers were my passion and I patterned my batting stance after Dolf Camilli and Dixie Walker. I remember my brother—he was about eleven or twelve—complaining to my father that our friends didn't want to play ball with me because I couldn't run, or steal, or field. I couldn't even catch, because we had no backstop, and fouls were a dime a dozen. And then one day I heard them call me "gimp," not maliciously, but with delight in teasing that small boys like to indulge in. I think back with horror now, how cruel it was, how unfair.

But I was one of the lucky ones. My father and mother insisted I compensate—so I played several musical instruments, and wound up at a good school. Now I play professionally, and I'm eternally grateful to my dear parents. And for more than that, too. I was nearly ten when the baseball incident occurred, and I shall never forget the day I came

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home from our field—really an empty, dirty lot. My leg felt even more superfluous that day. My father was home early, for some reason, and when I saw him, I started crying and crying. He sat me down and started talking. "Billy," he said, "you have a clubfoot. It was an accident of birth. No one is to blame. This is merely one of those things in life you'll have to become reconciled to." And he went on to tell me that it would never be easy for me, but that while baseball playing was out, I could do everything else as well as others. I never forgot that. There were many, many wonderful things in life, he said. And when I became depressed on many later occasions, I always thought of my father's talk. He's dead now, but I know how much it pleased him when I graduated from college as a music major.

"They certainly have a burden to bear."

*A teacher of the handicapped, with one of her own children moderately handicapped, has this to say.*

What do I tell parents who ask for advice? What can I honestly say? I tell them that they have just got to be strong. Some parents don't even ask for advice. Take one little boy with cerebral palsy. He wears braces and walks with canes. His mother is a beautiful woman. She is very involved with herself, and she makes him very independent. She doesn't even call for him; he takes the bus. He has developed quite a wonderful social sense.

Take another case. No child lives in a vacuum. I know one woman whose son developed a very severe case of polio.

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He can barely walk, and has one operation after another. In fact, the boy just had a spinal operation. Believe me, it's heartbreaking to see a child so beautiful and so intelligent so crippled. It's making his mother sick, and I don't think she can take it much longer. What do the parents tell a child like that?

You take everything step by step. When a child develops polio, you don't go to him and say, "Look, you had a germ, and this is what happened, and later on in life you may be rejected." You don't go about it that way. No, this is not something like telling a child about the facts of adoption. It is an accident, and as the problems come up you tell the child.

Nobody understands your problem as well as one who has experienced it. One who has will tell you to be sure your child gets the best possible education, good vocational guidance, and advice from any person who has a handicap. Above all, try to be understanding, because the handicapped certainly have a burden to bear.

"... I believed that she should stand up and defy her tormentors."

*Here, a mother from Michigan speaks of her experiences with her daughter's deafness.*

When Amy was two and a half or three years old, and her speech didn't develop normally, I began to suspect that something was wrong. She still responded to bells, hand clap-

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ping, and things of that sort, but specialists told me the truth by the time she was ready for kindergarten.

I sent her to a school for the deaf, and the fact that I had once taught hard-of-hearing youngsters gave me some experience with the thing. I discovered that doctors cannot always be sure, and frequently psychologists confuse mental retardation with near-deafness. You see, if a child were completely deaf there would be no question. You call the child, the child doesn't respond. You clap, the child doesn't start.

She went to a special school, and I remember, the second day she was in the school, she came home and she put her hand on her neck and said, "Cough," to me. When you say "cough," you can feel that little movement in your throat. Put your hand in front of your mouth, and you hear that breath, "co," and from then on I knew for sure. At six years old she came home one day, and I saw that she had written a whole sentence: "Amy is six." She hadn't had any training, but the teacher had put the book in her lap, and it said: "Michael is six. Roberta is six." You know? She wrote it herself. *Then I knew that she wasn't retarded.*

At that school, they have a wonderful parent-training program, and they have some wonderful people teaching there too. We parents compared notes, and we realized that many of us had the same type of experience. We were often told our children were mentally retarded. She would get up very early in the morning, at about six o'clock, and take the bus. I can remember the first experience: she would go there with the children, stay there almost all day, and come back tired and irritable.

We didn't tell her she was going to a special school. She

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didn't communicate. We couldn't communicate with her that way. Here's what I did. I put her on the bus, and I always waited for her when she came back. She realized that she would come back. She didn't mind going there.

What was her development at that time? What would you compare it to? Physically she was like any other child. She had wonderful motorability, good coordination. As far as her speech was concerned, she was like a year-and-a-half-old child—very limited vocabulary. But in second grade, I felt that her classmates had very poor speech. Amy would come home and show me that the children who wanted ice cream held out their hand; if they wanted money, they would make another gesture. And at that time they were just beginning to try out the idea of sending hard-of-hearing children to classes with normal children. Well, I decided to try out a regular school because she did have more speech than the average child. The League for the Hard of Hearing always wanted hard-of-hearing children in the regular grades, and I felt this way. But you cannot make any set rules. You really have to see how it works out with a child. There are children who have severe hearing loss, and can get along better than some of the children who don't have as much loss. There are many factors that go into it.

Each child is an individual. After all, he has parents who influence him, and the way he adjusts is really what should determine his placement. And at the time I didn't know if Amy was ready or not.

I remember the first day Amy walked out with a hearing aid. It looked very big at that time. She was about five and a half, and one little kid said, "What's that contraption?" But



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fortunately Amy always wanted to wear a hearing aid. I never did explain that to her either. I just put it on her, and she wanted to wear it. I never had any trouble. I know another little girl who has never worn a hearing aid, and refuses to wear one.

She did very well academically in the school. But unfortunately there was a little girl who lived next door who had problems. I have always tried to determine why that little girl was so cruel. She was a natural-born leader and she really made Amy's life miserable for a long period. She ridiculed her. I went over to the teacher when Amy was about six years old, and said, "Do you think she ought to be able to say 'Indian'?" because "Indian" is very hard for a deaf child to say. The "n" and the "d" are very hard sounds. Amy had come to me, and told me that she said something inexplicable instead of "Indian," and this little girl gathered all the children around her to hear Amy say this. I sometimes think I did the wrong thing. Many times Amy came home crying. But I believed that she should stand up and defy her tormentors. And I told her that.

Look, I feel this way. Every child should be educated with as normal a group as possible. That much I feel, and that much I work on. Every child should be allowed to be as normal as possible. The ideal situation would be to develop the kind of civilization or community that accepts all children. The child himself always starts out by trying to join the normal group. It is very difficult. People who can communicate don't realize how difficult it is for a person to be accepted who can't really get his ideas across. After all, I am more or less articulate, because people can understand what

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I am saying. But if I had to write out half of what I was saying, and mumble the rest of it, somewhere along the line they'd lose interest.

How is it with the deaf? They are one of the least accepted groups because it is difficult to talk to them. And almost all the things you do with other people involve talking, getting your ideas across. That is why many of them eventually go and stay with the deaf. I read an article about a deaf boy. He said he was happy that his mother let him be trained with the hard-of-hearing people. Then I started to read between the lines—he was twenty-eight, and he had just joined a deaf group. There's your answer.

Parents are human beings. They are personalities. I feel that the best kind of parent a child can have is a mother who is a real housewife, who is very warm and outgoing, and devotes all her time to her children. This didn't happen to me. I went to work, and I was involved with other things, and Amy didn't bother me. I'd love to lose myself in a book—you know—get away from it all. And many times I did that. Amy resented that. Of course, it was a mistake. I shouldn't have done it. Now I make a point of spending time with Amy, and talking a lot with her.

If I were to give advice to somebody in the same position as I was, I would tell them plenty. First of all, get the best medical advice, and then don't keep saying, "I don't believe." Once you get advice that you feel is reliable, don't run to the doctors. Do what you are told. Get the best hearing aid, and get the best educational advice. And get as much help for the child as you can. For the deaf and the hard-of-hearing child there is only one way to develop language which, in the final analysis, is the most important thing. You have to talk to the

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child, and that is the most difficult thing to do. You can give a child clothing. You can give a child money, but you have to give of yourself. In other words, if you have a child that hears, you can be washing the dishes and talking and sweeping, but with a deaf child you have to stop everything and really give your all to that child. That is a hard thing to do.

*Amy, now sixteen, recalls her childhood years as difficult and burdensome.*

Anyone who says that being deaf doesn't matter, and that deaf people are exactly like normal people simply doesn't know what he is talking about. From my earliest years I knew that I was hard-of-hearing, and that other kids were making fun of me. Some of the kids in my elementary school classes laughed at me, and were very cruel. Every time I mispronounced, they laughed at me. At that age I couldn't be expected to explain away their behavior. Even some teachers were hard to get along with. I had two teachers, I remember, who wouldn't repeat questions for me.

My parents were really my lifesavers. I pity the handicapped kid whose parents don't know what to do or where to go to get help, especially if their folks have no money. My mother, at least, had been a lip-reading and speech teacher. She knew a good deal. My problems are far from being solved, but at least my mother and father are on my side.



# IV

## HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS: THE COMMUNITY



## *Prejudice and Discrimination*

*The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.:*

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

“The Negro parent has to work harder at being a parent, which is quite a hard job anyway.”

*A forty-six-year-old Negro librarian in Michigan:*

I offer my children special enrichment in the cultural achievement of the Negro. We belong to the Negro History Association and I read *Phylon*, the literary and race journal. In short, I try to show my kids that colored people have made important contributions to civilization, and that Negro heroes can also become the heroes of our children.

*A lawyer, thirty-five, living in New York City:*

I suppose I was one of the fortunate few, a Negro in America, born into wealth and eminent social position. My

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mother was a real rarity—the granddaughter of a free Negro; my father ran away from home early and made himself a fortune as a physician, real estate man, banker, and whatnot.

My earliest and most vivid memories as a youngster are certainly not concerning race. In fact, I hardly thought of myself as “different,” if by that one means a mark of inferiority. After all, we were far more educated and cosmopolitan than the rednecks and closed-minded petty businessmen around. My world was taken up by my own kind, and when we moved up to Baltimore my parents became an accepted portion of the local upper class.

Our servants were Negroes, the chauffeurs, gardeners, and the like, all Negro. What did that mean to me? Hardly anything, inasmuch as my parents always answered with a distracted tone what few questions about being black I did pose. We were the “same” as others. Discrimination and slums and all that were merely the inevitable outcome of the shiftless classes, Negro and white. All that we children had to do was study hard, socialize with our own class, and all would be well.

#### *This man lives in New York City.*

I work in a filling station, and it's a pretty good job, but I teach hate. I'm going to be forty-five years old next month, and it's nearly thirty years since I left my home in Alabama. My parents lived not too far from Mobile, and they had eighteen children, no education, no rights, just a lousy little dirt farm and no hope. Everywhere that damned white Southerner was boss.



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It was always a white man's world. Who in hell gave them the right to call us "nigger," and squash all the life and hope out of us kids? Who ever said that Christ was white? And all the time I wanted to go up North for more opportunity, and when I arrived I found the whites spit on us here, too. Maybe not all whites but enough of them to last me out all of my years.

I married, and have three kids now, two boys and a girl, and as they get older I ain't smart enough from books to tell them what to say and how to act, but I'll make them understand that in this white man's world nothing comes to him who sits on his ass. This is a colored world too, and I want my kids to get a share of it.

My oldest kid asks me all the time about black and white, and I tell him the truth; most of them hate us, and aren't any good. You gotta fight for your rights, and I mean fight. Any colored man or woman doesn't do that is no good. The whites hate us, and we gotta hate them back. They squashed the life outta us, and we want our kids to live just as good as them.

*A factory worker, who came to Detroit in 1946 after his discharge from the Army Air Force, presents the opposite view. He left school after the seventh grade in his native Louisville, Kentucky. He has six children. He is also a lay preacher.*

No good teachin' hate, man, no good, no good. Because when you hate, you just as sick as those that hate you. You lowered yourself. Me, I teach my children to rise above it,

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man. Rise above it. I tell them something wrong with them that hate us. They just gotta feel better than somethin' because they so black inside. Hate is like a real sickness. Don't want you getting yourself sick, I tell my children. No, man.

*A young Negro honor student in a sixth grade Brooklyn, New York, elementary school speaks of a recent experience.*

What's wrong with white people? My father saved all of his life for a house. Momma is a church organist and pianist. My brother is ten and cute. He's a pretty good student, and watches every Met baseball game. Yet as soon as we moved into a house, all the white families began to sell out and run away. I asked my parents about this, and they told me that the whites were scared people, and didn't like us because we were colored. My father says colored people are different from whites in their skin color, but that isn't anything to be ashamed of. He says everybody is different in many ways. My father believes in even loving his enemy. I'm all mixed up. Are those whites my enemy?

**"What I Tell My Child About Color."**

*By William Gordon\**

Managing Editor, *Atlanta Daily World*

"Daddy, why can't I get a drink from that fountain?" I shall never forget that day, my kid standing there, looking



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me straight in the eye. My first impulse was to snatch him away from the fountain and proceed without an answer. Instead, I said: "Colored folks don't drink from that fountain. Can't you see the sign says, 'White Only'?" I walked on, hoping he would forget the matter. But he persisted: "Daddy, what do you mean by 'White Only'?"

Questions like these haunt every Negro parent who wants to bring up his youngster without fear and the crippling stigma of inferiority. My son Bill Jr. was only five when he became conscious of color.

Our neighborhood is all-Negro, but still there are many children of varied shades.

"Mother, why did Henry get angry with me when I called him black?" Bill asked.

"Some children don't like to be called black," his mother replied. She told him about the different races, stressing the point that "God loved them all," but explaining that every person didn't know the story of creation.

"But, Mommy," Bill broke in "is black bad?" His mother pointed to me. "Look," she said, "Daddy is the same color as Henry. Daddy isn't bad."

The kid stood there for a while, studying our faces. Finally, he slowly walked away to join his friends and play again.

My wife and I looked at each other. The problem had finally come. And now, our task was to teach the child how to have respect for himself, how to mingle with others, how to account for human differences without developing a complex; in short, to guide him through the maze of race relations in the Deep South and, at the same time, give him a healthy outlook on life.

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Very few whites realize the trouble to which some Negro families go to avoid hurting their children. Some buy automobiles, even at a sacrifice, to take their children to and from school—just so they won't have to ride in segregated buses. Others, who can afford it, send their youngsters off to the North or East to visit with friends at vacation time.

"When my boy was younger, I frequently took him to Grant Park to visit the zoo," said one of my friends, a former schoolteacher. "I literally dreaded the place, because we could not sit on the benches or buy popcorn or soft drinks. I always had to make excuses to my kid, and I feel ashamed of it to this day."

Our own son had his first direct experience with prejudice while visiting the park with his teacher and a group of youngsters.

"Daddy, I went into the restaurant to get a sandwich and the man yelled at me," he said. "There was a policeman there too. He was nicer than the man behind the counter. He just told me they couldn't serve me."

I was fearful that our child would become embittered, as did a friend's eight-year-old son. One day, when this boy saw some white people driving through our neighborhood, he cried, "Stop them, Daddy. They won't let us go through their street—don't let them come through here!"

Bill Jr. is now nine, and we are glad that he has acquired no hostile feelings toward whites. We realize that all his questions pertaining to race have not been asked; that there are many situations he has not encountered. And we hope that when we are asked additional questions, we can answer in such a way as not to destroy his confidence.

For almost every day now, we get the feeling that more

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humane elements are at work, all over the South. For example, at the big supermarket near the state capitol, the young white boys who assist us with our groceries are courteous to all. They surprise us with their "Yes, sir," and "No, sir."

Such experiences make us feel that white parents are also trying to raise their children without bigotry. This is encouraging, for children are born without prejudice, and it is every parent's job—white or Negro—to see that they don't acquire it as they grow older. Let's hope the day is not far off when none of us will have to explain color to our kids.

"What I Tell My Child About Color."

*By James W. May\**

*Assistant Professor, School of Theology,*

*Emory University, Atlanta*

"That's a nigger house. The bathroom's outside." Our son Jamie, almost six, was identifying a sharecropper's cabin by a sandy road in South Georgia. My wife and I were not ready for this. We had wondered when and how our son would first express his awareness of color differences. We knew, of course, that it would come, just as surely as sex awareness.

Well, here it was, and my first play was a fumble. "Son, 'nigger' is an ugly word. A colored person is a Negro. Don't let me hear you say 'nigger' any more."

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My wife, as usual more alert to the subtleties of emotional tension, helped us both by changing the subject.

So began our discussion of color almost two years ago. Today, we encourage discussion, on the level Jamie can manage. Our concern is to keep him from embracing uncritically the familiar rationalizations based on color.

Every day brings its cliché: All Negroes drive second-hand convertibles. (That one is from the playground.) All Negroes say "ain't." (From school?) All Negroes "talk funny."

Some we bypass. Some we discuss.

We hadn't planned to discuss segregation in the schools until we thought Jamie could understand the complex issues. We wanted our son ready to face change, but we didn't want to make him a conspicuous rebel among his friends. One evening at supper, however, I decided to bring up the subject.

"Jamie," I probed, "how would the kids at your school like to have colored children in class?"

The answer was ready. "Why can't they go to their own schools? Why do they have to come to ours? Besides, I don't like to hear their voices, I heard them on T.V."

I would have let that one pass, but his mother reminded him of the church nursery school in New York. "You liked to play with the Negro boys and girls there." She spoke of "the nice lady from India" who was one of the teachers.

It was well to remind him; but we were close to an argument, and the argument, we should have known, does not help.

Jamie was prepared to surrender, but not yet with conviction. So I did not press the point. Our own attitudes tell

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more than our moral lectures. We do want him to be spared some of the emotional excess baggage we have lugged about. But we do not have all the answers. We want him to learn to find answers for himself. Jamie, now a seven-year-old, learns about people and issues from the feelings we express. He appreciates the people that we appreciate. This is where he gets his principles of sportsmanship and citizenship.

Of course, the ideas and the phrases that Jamie picks up from his playmates are just as superficial as his pontifications on jet planes and Navy frogmen. Yet there is a difference. Whereas his everyday experiences will correct many of these other misconceptions, he has no normal contacts to correct his prejudices about color.

If Jamie had Negro playmates, he might react as he did when he met the Korean chaplain in the university cafeteria line. Jamie was so impressed by this young man's friendliness that when we came to our table, he inquired if the Korean could eat with us.

"Sure," I said. "You go ask him." Jamie darted off through the crowd with his invitation, and was back almost as quickly with his guest. For a week afterward, he was parading his three-word Korean vocabulary before the kids on our block, and explaining how he gained such proficiency.

So our next step, already overdue, is to provide normal boyhood experiences shared with Negro children. How do we arrange it? Will Jamie like it?

"Jamie," I inquired the other day as we left the barber-shop, "how would you like to have a colored boy come to play with you Saturday afternoon?"

"How old is he?"

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"About eight," I guessed.

"Sure, if he can play baseball!"

*A Washington, D.C., teacher, father of two:*

The most marvelous thing to have happened to our children, and I mean our colored children, is the recent renaissance of the Negro in this country. It gives a sense of not waiting on history, but in moving it ourselves. We waited for a long time for white friends to lend a hand; but those on the other side were far too many and too strong. Now, since the sit-ins we have given our youngsters a firm belief in shaping their own destinies. Just recently my twelve-year-old boy, who had been picketing with me under NAACP auspices, came to me and told me, "Dad, I'm glad to be colored." Believe me, neither my father nor I would ever have said such a thing.

"Don't white parents teach their kids anything proper about us?"

*"Until you're colored, even for a day, you can't know what it means," said a thirty-three-year-old housewife and former fashion model. Her husband is an engineer in a large New York company.*

We live in a mixed neighborhood, about 60-40 percent now, Negro to white. I remember once taking our



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daughter, Alice, to a bakery. Another little girl came in, saw us, and said aloud, "Gee, that lady has a brown face, Mom-mie." The child was about five or six. It was an innocent remark, and there was nothing wrong with my face but the woman became so violent as well as embarrassed that she practically dragged the child out of the store, all the time telling her child to shut up. You know, this child will never have a good feeling about seeing people with faces that aren't white, because the mother became so violent. So upset and so flushed. It was like seeing someone with a badly mauled face and saying, "Isn't that terrible?" Alice is ten and she understands.

I sometimes think that the main trouble with whites is that they think we're freaks. It's so easy for them to accept differences among, say, Greeks and Turks, and Republicans and Democrats, but they find it hard to differentiate between nonwhites. We are different, you know. If only we could be treated normally. Alice watches other children in her Sunday school hit one another, and she would actually like to be hit by them at least once in order to feel a part of the crowd.

I have a white friend, a very good friend with whom I used to model, and we are genuine friends with her and her husband. We can talk to one another and exchange ideas, and get mad at one another, and still be warm friends. She has tried to keep up our friendship even though she now lives in the suburbs. But sometimes it's very difficult.

One time another Negro girl and myself brought our daughters to their home. Their little girl said innocently of our two colored daughters, "You know I am getting awfully mixed up. I don't remember which one is which." Alice was

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then a year older than Jeanne, the other colored child. They don't look alike at all. One has a little birthmark on her nose. I thought that was interesting. She was saying what everyone does about the other when there is almost no day-to-day contact among the different races and religions, that "they all look alike."

Albert, my husband, sometimes comes home infuriated. "Don't white parents teach their kids anything proper about us?" Each day he seems to hear talk about a "boy" and a "girl." Now often, I run into this sort of thing myself. Nine times out of ten it refers to Negro women who are working for white women, which is perfectly all right because that is the way they are making their living, but nine times out of ten they were about thirty years older. You might say, "The person who works for me" or "Mrs. So-and-So" or "Mary Jane" but not "my girl did this," and "my boy did this."

We went to a Human Relations Workshop, and we brought up this thing of talking about "the boy"—"the boy in our house who does repairs for us." God, you can just picture a man of about fifty-five, a super or something, and he really hasn't been a boy in a long, long time, and you just shouldn't speak of him in this manner. The super here in our apartment house is a Negro, and some of the white people call him by his first name, and it sort of jars me because I have difficulty calling older people by their first names. In our family, an older person was called "Uncle" if he were a close friend; otherwise you called him "Mr. So-and-So." You never called older people by their first names. This is a form of showing respect, and children hear these things, and it tends to become a pattern.

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*Albert, her husband:*

Race is important only because white bigots have made it so, and too many have capitalized on it. But it does serve a purpose. It becomes important when you talk to a bank about a mortgage, when you speak about education, or the need to develop one's talent, to get what limited opportunity there is. I don't tell my child nonsense about anyone becoming president of the United States. It is patently absurd. Everybody knows it. The truth is that no Negro in political life will ever beat a white person in an open election unless Negroes are in the majority. So you see that it is very difficult for me to tell my child about white people in terms of respect and brotherhood and love, because I haven't found it. I have no illusions. I thought that with a college degree I would meet sophisticated, urbane, intelligent people of all races. I haven't, at least not among the whites.

Negro youngsters of middle-class parents, such as we, are having their special problems. Today talk of race is fashionable and desirable; yesterday it may not have been. I mean so many of us wanted to shield our kids.

Personally, I don't talk to my daughter about differences. I talk about similarities, that is, things in common between all men—things that cross religious, ethnic, and racial lines. Before all this new enthusiasm about race erupted with the sit-ins and pickets and our new pride, I avoided telling my child about the negative side of being a Negro in this country. I think that type of emphasis can be murderous on a child. We are improving our state, and we tell her that to continue to pressure the white community is just and proper.

Remember, our child is more than a Negro. We are try-

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ing to teach her how to adapt and function in the world she will mature in. The problem of race is no different from the problem of sex or anything else one must explain to a child. In the first place it must be clear. It must relate to something within the child's experience, and it must give her some sense of direction.

"How did so many of my people manage to adjust when they were kids?"

*"The white world may not know it but we even have to explain race differences among Negroes to our children more than the distinctions between the three so-called races." The speaker is an instructor in a state college in California.*

The first thing I had to do for my children was to clarify the wide band of color in our own family. I am dark and my wife is light. My son Frederick is nearer my skin color, but still different; my daughter Gloria is somewhat different from all of us. So, we are four separate colors. Frederick is ten, and he asks about it. He's little concerned with whites, only with us at this time. I answered that this is the way we are. He then asked my we weren't red or yellow or pink. I could only answer that we are as we are because many different peoples had lived on this earth for a long time, and we are a little bit like a lot of them, even the whites. He's ten, mind you, and that's as far as he wants me to go, and as far as I do too. There are seven gradations of color in the grandchildren of our family. On the other hand, our nieces and nephews in adolescence are more troubled by color, ours

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and theirs. For our youngest we tell stories about little brown children, or leave about some books and magazines about Negroes.

The whole thing is trying. The Negro parent has to work harder at being a parent, which is quite a hard job, anyway. The parent receives too many rebuffs from the outside, but the gain is much greater if he can raise his children well so that they can be good men and women, proud of being colored. God, but the problems are vast. How did so many of my people manage to adjust when they were kids? And the poor Negro family—why it is still so fragmented—it is still fighting the elementary battle of staying alive.

*This woman worked for years with Negro and Puerto Rican parents and children in a New York City settlement house.*

Many of the more sensitive parents, inarticulate as they might have been, would ask us occasionally why tell their kids about the world of discrimination and prejudice? Why spoil them now? Reality would come quickly enough. And my answer, even if some of my colleagues disagree in part at times, was that there is precious little we can hide from them. Television, the movies, radio, the press and picture magazines are such now that you can no longer seal the children off after they are six or seven. If some things they discover are painful, that's life. Any parent who teaches their kids that life is a song and dance is a damn fool. But it isn't a "nasty, brutish" place either. The problem of parenthood, especially for Negro parents, is to help their

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kids find out who they are, to let them find their own sense of identity, and be able to live with dignity\* whatever the circumstances may be. This is the Negro child's life problem. It is the reality of his life.

"Every bigot was once a child."

*A trained psychologist who specializes in human relations reports.*

Years ago some Catholic nun wrote an interesting little article with a fascinating title, "Every Bigot Was Once a Child." Her point was that children entered nursery school, of all places, with various prejudices. Their basic training came, of course, from home and family.

How is it transmitted to the young? In a million little ways—from a slanderous remark about another group to a bad joke, from a fear of Negroes to a chance remark about keeping "their kind out of the neighborhood." Children are influenced more by the personal experience of parents and what they do than what they say. Parents will say, "You mustn't be prejudiced against neighborhood Jews and so

\* There is an interesting footnote to this discussion. Back in 1958, a group of investigators questioned 225 white and colored youngsters between the ages of three and seven. "A rapid increase in the ability to discriminate between the races was found in both racial groups, although white children often differentiated at an earlier age." What was most interesting was that Negroes "assigned negative roles to Negro children more frequently than did the whites assign such roles to white children." Harold W. Stevenson, and Edward C. Stewart "A Developmental Study of Racial Awareness in Young Children" (University of Texas, Austin, Texas).

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forth," but the attitudes they have—they don't even have to say anything—are reflected in tone of voice, expression on the face, and so forth. If the parents show that they have prejudice, the children are much more affected by that than they are by what the parents say.

This is just as true, if not more so, in the newer suburban developments with their homogeneous populations, since all along people were saying that all you have to do is raise the level of education, and automatically that will eliminate prejudice. But that isn't so. You get a more highly rational prejudice in your so-called middle and upper social and economic groups. People who live in the center of town, more in contact with the minority groups, come to accept the situation, and live with it better than the people who live on the fringes of town, where you have less contact and more hysteria. And of course a lot of studies have been made in housing developments which show that prejudice goes down as people live in daily contact with one another. There is a high degree of prejudice among people who move into an interracial housing development, and it gradually diminishes—in the second, third, and fourth year—as they discover the people who live next door do not necessarily conform to the stereotype. Somebody once said: "Prejudice is like pregnancy. You can't have a little bit of it." In other words, a person who is prejudiced against Jews or Catholics or Negroes or Protestants is going to go the full circle, and I think that was brought out very well in Nazi Germany. Theoretically prejudice began there with the prejudice against Jews, but in a very short time it was pretty apparent there was prejudice against not only Jews, but Catholics and Protestants who didn't conform,

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Negroes, gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, and so forth. The fact of the matter is that in no study of prejudice in the United States have investigators ever been able to find the person who is prejudiced against just one group.

Once you make some parents aware of the fact that they are prejudiced, they are more likely to try to correct it—certainly in terms of overt expression in the presence of their children. Parents underestimate the intellectual capacity of the child. The child—before he or she enters the nursery school—has vast intellectual concepts in terms of prejudice, and knows from the way in which a parent talks about a neighbor or a neighbor's child that one group is preferred, and another group is not preferred. Therefore one tries to make parents aware of this, because they are likely to do something to correct their behavior. But you have to make them aware. It is not just a question of verbalization. Once you begin to do that, then you have laid the groundwork for rearing a child who can go into kindergarten without crippling prejudice.

Parents assume that in not saying anything about other races and other religions, they are not ~~teach~~ing anything about them. The mere fact that they omit any mention of other races and other religions from their conversation is an indication of opinion. The fact of the matter is that unless the parents are willing to have other people into the home socially, such as Negroes and people of different religions, and demonstrate to the kids that they actually believe what they are saying, then anything they say doesn't make too much difference. The children realize that what they are saying is just meant to impress them, and the children pick up the difference very often between what is meant and what



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the parents are trying to cover up when they talk in these areas. Most parents, when faced with a question of what is the difference between a white child and a Negro child, or what is the difference between a Jewish child and a Catholic child, will simply brush over the whole matter and say, "You wouldn't understand."

Frankly they have to face the fact that the child understands a lot more than they think he does. Should he overhear a derogatory remark about others, I think it is up to the parents to try to explain why it is that people make remarks of this kind. And once they are aware of their responsibilities in this area. I think you begin to lay the basis for real education for children with little or no racial or religious prejudice.

I once happened on a street fight where my nephews were involved. As it happens, they live in Washington Heights, an area of New York City that is thoroughly mixed. In this fight—which was over a disputed play at second base—everyone was involved—Jews, Catholics, whites, and Negroes. They were on all sides. And when it ended, these kids, from eight or nine to twelve or thirteen years old broke up the game, and left the area. Now one of my nephews did not complain that a Jewish boy hit him, only that *someone* hit him. He had been raised to value every person as an individual and not as an anonymous member of a group.

It is the job of the parent, first of all, to separate the thing from its racial and religious significance. Actually what happened was that two kids got into a fight. Their race or religion had nothing to do with this situation, and the parent has to try to make the child understand it is not a question of race or religion, and kids are going to have fights. If you can separate religious and racial overtones from the

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whole thing, you are much better off. The number one rule for parents is not to make a religious or racial battle out of something that may be just a fight between kids. If they do, if they put it on the basis of, "You poor little child, a Negro child hit you." This is going to make a lasting impression on the child, and from that time on "Negro" children are likely to hit him. If the parent puts it on the basis of, "Joe hit you, and you hit Joe," it is something that the child is going to forget in about half an hour, and the parent may look out the window and see the two kids playing together. But if, on the other hand, it is all wrapped up in emotion in terms of the parents' fears about race or religion, then the child will, in a very definite way, bear the scars of what is really just an ordinary fight between two kids.

Basic, of course, is the relationship between the parent and the child. This is mostly between the mother and child, because about 80 percent of the attitudes are formed by the mother. If the relationship is one of love and security, then the possibility of the children being able to combat prejudice is much better. Actually most prejudice comes from a sense of insecurity, and one of the reasons why parents almost deliberately inculcate prejudice in children is the idea that in this way they make life simpler for the child. They say to the child: "Well, that group over there is all bad, and your group is all good. Life is going to be very simple if you just go with your group and avoid that group." It is this business of trying to simplify things for children that leads to incorrect teaching and prejudice. If there is a sense of security in the home, and the children can come to their parents and talk frankly and freely about these problems, get answers that are not hypocritical, and see their parents

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acting in an honest fashion without having a double standard between what they say and what they do, then the child is going to do the right thing.

*A white sales manager, forty-seven, the father of two children, who lives in a prosperous suburb near New York City:*

I feel a bit peculiar when my kids ask about other races and religions. The only Negroes they ever see are Shirley, our maid, and the domestics of our neighbors. There may be one or two colored kids in the elementary school, but I suppose their people are servants, too. When my kids do ask questions or make remarks about colored faces, I'm quite confused. I mean, what do you tell a child about a group of people they've never really met? It's like teaching them about Laplanders. So I try to compromise. We hardly ever speak about them, and where there are questions, for example, when my kid asked why the servants are always colored, my reply is that they haven't had too much of a chance for education, that given some schooling they are as capable as the white. At least I'm not poisoning their minds that way.

*A white insurance agent who lives outside Philadelphia:*

I'm for integration in principle but not in practice. Everybody is prejudiced, and I want my children to grow up among their own. I tell my children that we have more ambition and drive, and that's what makes us better people.

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I also say that while I would never object to a single Negro family buying a house on our block, I would fight like the dickens against any more than that. You let more than one in, and they all want in. Then, I tell my children, property values sink, and none of us are safe anymore. I tell them that everybody should live with their own kind.

#### *A New York City teacher:*

My school was once tops academically. Since the Puerto Ricans poured into the school, it has deteriorated badly. I know that they're the cause of it all, but I also know far more than that, about miserable environment, about the United States' colonial practices on their island, and about a good deal more. Thus, I can drive through the streets where they live, and wonder at the dirty lives they lead. But I also know deep in my heart that many of them will rise out of the squalor and dirt, and that a generation or two from now they'll have assimilated. "Give them time" is my answer to my white middle-class students who criticize them. All immigrant groups went through the same process. Meanwhile, more and more of their children are already beginning to bridge the gap.

#### *A thirty-year-old Boston architect reminisces:*

I'll never forget my "zadie," that's Yiddish for grandfather. He was an old man with a full white beard and a tall skullcap. He looked like a prophet. He lived in Baltimore,

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and every so often Dad would take us down for a visit from Portland, Maine, where we lived. Once when I was very young and on a visit there, some kids in the street yelled at me, "kike," "kike," "sheeny bastard," and things like that. I ran crying to my zadie. He flew into a majestic rage, and thundered out the words: "You are a Jew. A Jew, Moses, gave the world the Ten Commandments. The Jews gave the world the Torah and one God." It didn't seem to help much at the time, but, looking back, it makes good sense. In his wisdom he said nothing negative about those little bastards. Only by pointing out that I should be proud to be a Jew did he indirectly indicate how wrong they were. If a Jew has an inner sense of pride, cheap taunts can't really hurt.

*A white housewife, college graduate, living in a Boston suburb:*

I'm not Jewish, but one day my children saw a television show about concentration camps, and ran to ask me how German people could have been so terribly cruel. I answered without much thought, but I think it was pretty good at that. I said to my eight- and nine-year-old girls that Hitler was crazy, and the Germans who followed him were equally mad. Anyone who still believed in killing that way should be locked up forever. That satisfied them.

*A Mexican-American lawyer, forty-four, father of five children, living in metropolitan Los Angeles, speaks about his own people.*

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In every way I've made it. I have position, education, money. But very few Mexican-Americans can say the same. In most ways, our lot is worse than the Negroes'. We live in ghettos, our children get less education, we earn less. Incredibly our housing conditions as a group are worse, and thus far we have no effective political organization or leadership. Nobody important seems to care a damn about us. And that is precisely what I teach my own children. We have opportunity, but it is for one purpose only, namely to help our fellow Mexican-Americans climb the ladder, and make their life easier. My children know that I do not gloat over my own material success while my people are miserable. That, too, I want my children to feel.

*What then, of the child and prejudice? Here Kenneth B. Clark, a psychologist, applies a few generalizations that go beyond the boundaries of race and religious discrimination.*

When a child asks questions about the inferior status assigned to his group because of its color or religion, these questions require an honest, even if painful answer from the parents. Nothing can be gained by denying that in imperfect society these forms of injustice exist. A parent might explain to his child: "People are treated differently, and often for unimportant reasons. It may be because their skin is a different color, or because they go to a different church, or because they speak with a different accent. This is known as prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice and discrimination are wrong and unfair. Many people are working hard to eliminate them, and in many ways succeeding."

### *Prejudice and Discrimination*

To be personally effective in the face of racial pressures, the child should be taught tolerance and compassion for other human beings—even for those who are prejudiced toward him. It is difficult to understand that the person who hates is a victim of his own ignorance and distortions; but if a child understands this, he has an antidote for the venom and bitterness that frequently develop in the victims of discrimination.\*

## *War and Violence*

War and violence, sustained cruelty, and the threat of war claim a high toll among children. How did the children of Britain learn to withstand the bombing raids of 1940 and 1941? In what miraculous way did a few children in the German concentration camps manage to hold on to life? And what of our new time of troubles, this age of nuclear uncertainty? Talk of crisis, of saber-rattling, and still more crisis fills the entire milieu with the techniques of violence, from television and newspaper to missile toys for innocent play. Not long ago a newspaper reported an incident where a first-grader ran out to greet the year's first snow. He began to eat it, and an older child, in this case ten, ran up to him and said, "Don't eat the snow. It's radioactive. It'll kill you."

To what extent are children really troubled and affected by a world of violence magnified by the mass media and the H-bombs? A recent study of the impact of nuclear bombs on Japanese children concluded that they were frightened, and that the "higher the academic grade, the more they feel concerned and troubled."\*

A good many people now know a unique helplessness in

\* This tentative conclusion was reached from studies of the second through the ninth grade. Takeo Shiokawa, "Youth's Attitudes Toward the Testing of Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs," *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*,



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that for the first time in the long journey of man, a parent cannot shield his child; a civilization cannot defend and protect its young. And also for the first time, a literate, educated layman cannot distinguish honestly and confidently between conflicting scientific statements. How "safe" are the current levels of radioactivity? Is milk dangerous? Are wars a proper way to settle differences? Are any differences so great that war then becomes the only way out? The list of baffling questions for the adult is legion. What then *does* one say to a child?

*Child therapist, fifty-three, New Orleans:*

The central problem is this: How can we help our children believe in the goodness of life despite the nuclear madness that surrounds us?

*Accountant, thirty-two, Korean veteran, Boston:*

I tell my kids that if the Commies want war, we'll have war. No use worrying about it. It's all up to them. If they start it, we'll clobber them.

*Group therapist, forty-one, New York City:*

If we want our children to believe in the future, *we* must believe in the future. We must work to make certain there is a future. To the extent we, as parents, have positive goals,

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and take steps to achieve them, to that extent only will our children be reassured.

#### *Housewife, thirty-three, Cleveland, Ohio:*

If the bombs start dropping, humanity will be wiped out. The thing to do is to make certain it doesn't happen. Anything else is a farce. That's what I tell my kids.

#### *Wife of State Department official, forty-five, Washington, D.C.:*

During the Cuban crisis, everyone on the street was watching me. I knew if I were to so much as pack a bag, the whole neighborhood would panic. The thing I particularly noticed was that children watched me as closely as adults. My children, too. You felt they were just as fearful as we. Of course, what no one knows . . . not even my own children . . . is that my husband and I have a secret agreement. He will not pick up the phone to warn me, even if war is coming.

"My parents will protect me. As long as they are around I am going to be all right, and I am not going to worry about this too much. . . ."

*"I think again of those horrible days back in 1940 in London, the 'Battle of Britain' as it came to be called. I was working intensively with five- and six-year-olds at the time, as*

*well as preschoolers, none of whom had been sent out of London for protection, and who were always in imminent danger of being blown apart." The speaker is a professional group worker, now nearly fifty, a British subject, and herself a mother of four.*

These children's lives were completely disrupted by their parents, who took them off to the underground for shelter every single night, and left them in our care during the day. Yet, in spite of all the horror about us, in spite of bombs and fires and collapsing houses, in spite of war and food shortages and separated families, when these little children came into our nursery school they were relatively relaxed. Looking back, it is amazing that this was so.

Even in the shelters their behavior was generally very good. One gets the feeling—and I think that this has been proved over and over again—that children of this age, which would be about five or six, react very clearly to the parents around them and to the adults around them. To the extent that the adults were relaxed—and they *were* (we made it a real point to remove teachers when their anxiety was so great that they could not function in a calm way)—these children were as relaxed as possible under the circumstances. The children felt sure that the adults would protect them, and as long as the adults stood by, the kids did not seem to be fearful. This did not mean, for example, that the war didn't creep into every part of their play in a variety of ways.

I can remember very clearly one boy who was five, and he was the only child in one particular nursery school who did not sleep. Everybody else was so damn exhausted, for they had been up so much at night. This child was a very high-

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strung, energetic kid, and he did not sleep. I can remember that this youngster was very angry with me because I was assigned to keep him quiet. Well, he was good and angry with me for several days, and finally he sat up in his bed, and said, "I hope a great big bomb will come down, and I hope it will hit this nursery school." And then he added as he tucked himself under the blanket, "and I hope there are no air raid wardens to dig you out." Meaning me. Even the hostility and the aggression of the kids came out in war references. We also found that, in many cases, the children who were particularly afraid were those whose parents were so busy that they didn't have time to spend with them, or where there was suffering from deep emotional stress because of the fathers being away. Over and over again, as we checked family situations, we found that where the parents were keeping their heads above water emotionally, there was less fear among the young.

This same pattern probably applies to school children today in their feelings about nuclear war. The parents are all-powerful. "They will protect me. As long as they are around, I am going to be all right, and I am not going to worry about this too much because my parents do that for me." We know that elementary school children constantly talk about war—they are anxious about war. In 1940, even those who were not interested in world affairs tuned in to the BBC.

The older children, seven to twelve, were generally away from London, Leeds, Manchester, and the other large cities, because at that time we had compulsory evacuation. Anna Freud has done some work on the really startling revelation that the children left in London with their families did not suffer quite so much stress and strain as those who were in

peaceful, lovely country far from the terrible days and nights of bombing. Their problem—which is somewhat akin to our contemporary difficulties with the Cold War—was compounded by the agony of being away from their families, not knowing what was happening to their mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters, and not having the interaction and warmth of family life.\*

In fact, during the blitz there was even a perverse kind of excitement at the horror of war, even about the bomb that fell—so long as it missed. Dad was away in the Army or Navy or RAF. Mum was at home or in uniform, and everyone else was doing something toward the war effort. Evenings you went for protection to the underground. The ground forces shot off their guns at the Nazi planes; everybody seemed to be doing something about the war and the bombing.

There was, I recall, one thing that was very devastating to the elementary school children who remained and that was that there was no child life. School was open for a long period of time. Yet children played in the streets with their friends only occasionally, since most of them had been evacuated. There was a kind of cutting off of all the group experiences that children grow up with, and this situation created many kinds of difficulty.

In the underground, which was a horrible situation of stress, you slept on blankets on the platforms, families together, but jammed up next to other families—absolutely no privacy and bombs falling all over the place. It was really a ghastly way to sleep. The kids were absolutely incredible.

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They laughed, they sang, they played, and then slept like logs. The really unbelievable thing was that the adults acted the same way too. The protection of the underground was enough for the moment, and there was a lot of hiding behind "life is good for tonight." There was much of this "don't worry about tomorrow" feeling that naturally got through to the children. We were a bit worried about the effect on the children's developmental processes. "What does this experience really mean to them?" could easily come to be a superficial "chin up"—that is, as long as you got through today, everything would be all right.

I met many children in Europe, in one concentration camp especially, where I was a Child Welfare Officer in 1945 and 1946. The youngsters were just a handful of the survivors. It was interesting to see, in talking with them, that they were able to think up countless fantastic defenses against the most excruciating horrors. We discovered a real blacking out and rationalizing about unspeakable cruelties within the camps which these youngsters had seen and experienced. In order to survive, they did what adults do in that kind of situation, namely pushed it away, far away, and made believe it didn't exist. This is what we saw over and over again in many of the children who were reporting their experiences as German captives. They actually described them somewhat more delicately than the way in which it really happened. By and large, there were many of us in those years who suspected that those kids who had any difficulty with stress merely lay down and died, because there was plenty of evidence that young children did just that. It wasn't only that many of them were killed, many of them *were* killed, but others absolutely could *not* cope with the tragedy and brutality and

family separations that they experienced. One of my fellow workers said that he had been told by one surviving remnant of a child that his mother had been compelled by her Austrian concentration camp guards to choose between him and his twin brother. He was the survivor, although his mother voluntarily went off to die with her doomed son. The twins were six when that occurred. You know, death wasn't always a question of avoiding being killed. It was frequently a question of no longer being alive.

I think the same thing applies to our world at this very moment. I know of several youngsters, seven, eight, or nine, who are completely aware that parental protection has its limits—in the schoolroom for example—and who know, or who think they know that total annihilation and nuclear disaster go together. But any fears they show will be real fears for them. "What will happen to me if it comes?" "Will I be separated from my family?"

Now is this a real worry, a realistic worry? And again, what can any child, five through twelve, make of the talk that no one may be left after an attack? This is the kind of thing they worry about and question their elders about. They say to me all the time, "If I don't have a shelter and the people down the block do, are they going to be safer than I am?" Children also say, "If I am in my shelter, and many other people do not have a shelter, what does that mean?"

My own eleven-year-old child came to me during the Cuban crisis in 1962, and asked if we would all die shortly. And why couldn't anything be done about it? And it took my rather dispassionate husband to remind me that for the first time in all of man's recorded history there are the ability and opportunity to destroy most of man's physical and

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human achievements on earth, and we can't do much about controlling the threat.

The truth is that we adults don't know the answers. To trust our leaders is Pollyannaish and, to the twelves and thereabouts, unpersuasive. Reason? Morality? Do they still exist in international politics? All this doubt and questioning make our youngsters extremely anxious. Our nine-year-old wanted to know, "What would happen to me during an air raid if Daddy is at work, and I am on the highway?" or "You're at home, and I'm at school?"

One thing parents should do when their children ask questions of this sort is, first, not run away from them as we have, sometimes, from questions about sex—"Don't bother me. Come back tomorrow," or the like. I think this ostrich attitude is another thing parents and teachers often adopt. They used it during the Second World War. They use it over and over again in discussing the unimaginable nuclear war: "Let's not get involved, this is more than we can manage. It is more than we should think about. Let's not bother about this." Yet this approach has its dangers, because children frequently ask questions about something or the other when what they are really thinking about is much more. The younger they are, the more fantastically vivid imaginations they have.

For example, I would never tell my youngsters about the actual horrors of war. I think we have to be awfully careful. A child may ask, "Does war maim people? Will Daddy be injured if he goes away to war? If there is a war or nuclear blast, will some of us die, and some of us lose our arms and legs?"

Very small children have deep-seated fears about destruc-



tion of body parts. This is something that kids in all kinds of circumstances, in all kinds of situations, worry about. I think if a child came to me and asked, "Could people get hurt in a war?" I might want to say, "Yes, people get hurt." I think I would add to that, "But, we would do everything in our power to see that there is no war." There is a technique of not specifically answering questions, and deciding what you will do about each question. But I think if we consider the child's age, we will perhaps get guidelines in answering questions about nuclear war in the way we have always answered complex questions. We know, for example, that when you give children more information than they really want, and you pile on even more information, you can make them more anxious than they were before. I think that children of five, maybe even six or older, need to be answered, whether it is about maiming or the other fears of nuclear war. But they need to have their questions answered briefly. The tendency to make long explanatory speeches to very small children, either about physical injury or about other dangers, might tend to add fears that they hadn't thought of in the first place. My advice would be to answer the question as simply as possible, and not take the opportunity to explain too much.

We have to be somewhat protective of small children, and answer them in terms of their age levels. We find that with older children—eleven and twelve—solid information is required.

Sometimes we also need to ask ourselves what the children are really anxious about. Is it the fact that a certain man is maimed? Or, as is often the case, are they asking, "How about me?" If a child asked a question about nuclear war, my response would be that people can get hurt in war, and if

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there were a war, then, yes, people would get hurt. If you tell children—and I am heartily opposed to this—that nobody gets hurt in war, their frame of reference, television, for instance, would make them say, “Gee, my mother is a liar.” In this case the parent is protecting her child in a way that is inappropriate, because children are observant. If you didn’t tell them that one can get hurt in war, and that war has to do with killing and death, they know from their own experiences that someone is trying to pull the wool over their eyes, and they resent that.

*Looking back at the 1940’s this woman, thirty-three, now a magazine editor, considers again her experiences as a child in the city of Hull during the German bombing raids.*

I don’t remember ever being frightened, since my parents had a kind of fatalistic attitude: We’ll survive or we won’t. Even when the house three doors away was demolished during an attack, I remember Mum kept on doing her housework. I never questioned that.

There were two exceptions, however. When the Germans sent over their “doodlebugs” or buzz bombs, they would make a sort of buzzing sound until the motor was shut off, and then we’d all hold our breaths to wait and see where it might explode.

I also remember walking to school with a chum, somewhat younger than I, and the sirens started wailing. We continued on our way, and suddenly a low-flying German plane swooped down, came so low, in fact, that I saw the pilot’s leather hat and goggles and a kind of gas mask over his

mouth. He could have strafed us then and there, and we backed up against a brick wall with the sirens screaming. He finally swung his plane skyward. Even today I get a shiver through me when I hear any siren.

"They are going to have to rethink their ideas about violence and aggression."

*A banker, father of three, who lives in a suburb of Washington, D.C.:*

I believe that we can no longer say to kids, "Let your aggressions go." These kids will run the world tomorrow. They are going to have to rethink their ideas about violence and aggression and even problem-solving. Complicated problems don't have simple answers despite what some politicians, editorial writers, and television cowboys tell us. I try to show my own children that the big questions about morality and God and man's relationship with other men defy easy solutions and pat answers. The same thing generally holds true with the big international and national problems. Good Lord, how can we teach our kids that a punch in the mouth, or action taken for the sake of action is the proper way, when questions like Asia and Africa and China stare us in the face? It's essential for my wife and me to show our children that inability to solve every problem quickly does not indicate failure. When you try to solve a really complicated problem, you often open up new problems that are just as tough. But we always try for some perspective. Have we made any progress? What remains to be done?

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"Kids really see what is going on."

*Another father, the owner of a gasoline station in a New York suburb:*

I have two kids, one eight and the other ten. We don't think about war too much. Personally I don't believe any side will ever use the bombs. But then again, they might. Anyway, kids don't live in a vacuum. They read, go to school, watch TV. And what do they see and hear? Violence, killing, rape, muggings, wars, until I wonder if it does them any good or teaches them anything except that most people seem to be lunatics. Then some fellow preaches peace on July 4th or Memorial Day or our priest talks about love. But the kids really see what is going on, and they become mixed up. I know I am.

"A child may stay up all night shivering in terror."

*Quite another approach has been taken by a father of four children, all in elementary school. He is a member of a California electronics firm specializing in computer systems.*

Most people think there is going to be total destruction, and of course they convey this to their kids. One fellow will say something to this effect to his wife, the kids pick it up, and while the parents might be moved momentarily, they can go on with their everyday business. But a child may stay up all night shivering in terror. I know some children who

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were told that a blinking star means the world is going to come to an end, and those children stand by the window and watch the stars until the early hours of the morning. As far as nuclear destruction is concerned, well, to put it simply, my wife and I look at it from the point of preparation. How prepared are we? Can we be absolutely certain that *nothing* will be left? So we tell our kids all about bombs and roentgens and radioactive fallout and all the rest. We tell them how people lived through Hiroshima and Nagasaki because they were told what to do.

As far as I know, my kids believe—and we do too—that the entire world will not be destroyed. Bombs cannot possibly blow up the world. I also tell my kids to plan their futures as if the world were bright and rosy. After all, there were people who lived in concentration camps during World War II for six or seven years. They went through savagery, yet many didn't commit suicide. Why didn't they say there was nothing to live for?

It is right to educate a child about the ways of the world. As far as I am concerned, the world has been like this so long, that to try and keep the facts from a child is an unrealistic and selfish way of bringing him up. It is dishonest. It is over-protective because children are going to run headlong into it sooner or later, and it might do more damage getting it the wrong way than getting it from you.

*This British housewife was six years old when her home in Coventry was bombed by the Luftwaffe. Today she has three children of her own, and lives just outside of Oxford*

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*with her architect-husband. She prefers to answer her children's questions with caution.*

"I always try to answer straight questions with straight answers, but it isn't always easy to do this without arousing anxiety." When Billy, seven years old, asked her whether they would all die if the Russians attacked with H-bombs, she said that she didn't know.

"But what do you think, Mummy?"

"Don't you fret, nothing will happen while Mummy is with you."

"But what if you're not with me?"

"Then I hope your teachers will take good care of you."

"Oh!"

"That word 'oh' is full of expression," she says. "But what does the child really think? It is often difficult to know."

*Then, again, an Oregon insurance executive believes in the "realistic approach."*

I tell them everything squarely, honestly, sincerely. They're my kids, and I want them to know that I trust them with this knowledge, and I want them to share in the intimacy, excitement, and fear, if you will, that all the things I explain to them bring. I tell them, in general, that if we have a nuclear war—my kids are in the fifth and sixth grades—that we may all die, and while none of us wants war, we would under those circumstances be better off dead than alive.

*A New Jersey doctor, father of five:*

What to tell your children rests on each person doing whatever his conscience tells him to do. Perhaps for some it means actively working with an organization. For others it may mean that children must learn to live out their lives in an age of nuclear uncertainty; that it is each child's birth-right to be shown that with so much degradation and horror and bestiality inherent in man, there is also an infinite capacity for beauty and gentleness and greatness as well. This is one of the remarkable and challenging things about us humans. And in the work we do and the way we spend our daily lives, we try to show that we're on the side of angels, and are trying desperately to see that the world becomes, if even in a small part, a better place for our young.





# V

## BIBLIOGRAPHY



One of the wonders of this book publishing age of ours is that no curious parent need ever be alone. At his or her beck and call are millions of printed words warning of the pitfalls of parenthood, injecting both guilt and confidence, at times predicting just what to expect at every moment of a child's life. Many of these books are a waste of type. More often than not, however, Americans continue to make a profession out of child-rearing techniques; indeed, the parent educator is without parallel in most foreign nations. "In our country," said an aroused Frenchwoman, "we raise our children by the heart, not the book." But this, too, is a presumptuous oversimplification. As any sensible parent finally comes to know, while there are no magic formulae, both personal experience and published literature have many things to tell us.

This is especially so where a child's questioning is concerned. Thus, if one were to want to build a highly selective and indispensable collection of printed works, it might start with the writings of a warm and generous writer, a prototype of the trusted family doctor, Dr. Benjamin Spock. His books sell in the millions and deservedly so. Any of them, or any of his regular *Redbook* articles is filled with intelligence, common sense, practical advice and a remarkable understanding of children. Phyllis Hostler's *The Child's World* (Roy, 1913; Penguin\*) is an extraordinary little book that offers wisdom about the child at home, in the world, and within himself. She has a penetrating chapter on "The Questioner" and some intelligent general principles. Written in a similar tone is Flanders Dunbar's *Your Child's Mind and Body* (Random House, 1911; Modern Library\*), the work of a Freudian psychologist, a mother herself. There is much here on divorce and marriage, sex and birth, death and other topics, all done vividly and well.

\* Indicates the paperback edition.

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There are a few other good basic titles dealing with specific areas discussed in this book. Sigmund Freud's daughter Anna, together with Dorothy T. Burlingham, wrote their pioneering *War and Children* (International University Press,\* 1914) based on experiences in three British nurseries during the German bombings of Great Britain in World War II. It is, unfortunately, long out of print. One essential point the authors do stress is how much more fortitude children generally had who were not evacuated, and remained, instead, at home. In a more recent horror, child survivors of the Hiroshima raid describe their feelings and experiences in Arata Osada's *Children of the A-Bomb*

In the field of racial and religious prejudice Kenneth Clark's *Prejudice and Your Child* (Beacon Press,\* 1915) stands out. Largely because of its dispassionate nature, this slim volume is really a poignant and practical plea to men of goodwill. Dr. Spock's *Prejudice in Children* and Robert Coles's *The Desegregation of the Southern Schools: A Psychiatric Study* (both published by the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith,\* 1913, 515 Madison Avenue, New York, 22, N.Y.) deal with elements of the same problem. Spock summarizes such basic topics as "Is Prejudice Natural?" "Parents and Prejudice," and "Can Integrated Neighborhoods Help?" Cole studied the Atlanta and New Orleans schools for two years, and concludes that integration is far easier when it starts in the primary grades, that very young whites have no "passionate dislike" for their colored peers, and that usually "tensions and ideologies of the adult world will not undo what is, after all, their 'childhood.'"

Frederick Elkin's *The Child and Society* (Random House,\* 1910) is a forthright treatment of the child as he moves into the outer world. Sex, values, prejudice and much more come under the scrutiny of this Canadian sociologist with results that are fresh and original. Ralph Eckert's *Sex Attitudes in the Home* (Association Press, 1916; Popular Library\*) deals with infancy, childhood, and adolescence. It is a good sex instruction handbook for parents that underlines the healthy role sex can play in the

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life of child and parent. In addition, Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg's *The Wonderful Story of How You Were Born* (Doubleday, 1912) and Karl De Schweinitz's *Growing Up* (Macmillan, 1913) are simple enough for the young reader. P. J. Bruckner's *How to Give Sex Instructions* (The Queen's Work,\* 1917, 3115 South Grand Boulevard, St. Louis 18, Mo.) offers a Roman Catholic point of view.

Louise Despert's *Children of Divorce* (Doubleday, 1913; Anchor\*) is a godsend for those compelled to raise children alone. An important point she makes is that many children of broken families do grow into healthy adults and do make happy marriages. Jim Egleson and Janet Frank Egleson met at a meeting of Parents Without Partners, Inc., and later married. Their book *Parents Without Partners* (Dutton, 1911) deals with the camaraderie and group therapy this organization supplies the single parent, as well as including both specific guidance and a superb selection on the divorced father.

An extraordinarily candid book about the handicapped is a collection of biographical accounts by the crippled themselves in Edith Heinrich's (editor) *Experiments in Survival* (New York: Association for the Aid of Crippled Children, 1912). For some of these handicapped, at least, being crippled is not simply the opposite of being whole. When one writer says that "Being blind is not a handicap. My life is exactly like that of other people," the editor counters with this, "This statement stands not, obviously, as a truth but as an excellent example of what a culture responsive to Hollywood confuses with the truth." Henry Viscardi, Jr.'s *A Letter to Jimmy* (Paul Eri<sup>l</sup> on, 1912) is addressed to handicapped children, and its author was born legless. It is moving, inspiring, and practical. Also of great help are such books as Edith M. Stern and Else Castendyck's *The Handicapped Child: A Guide for Parents* (A.A. Wyn, 1910); Dr. Abraham Levinson's *The Mentally Retarded Child* (John Day, 1912); Cornell Capa and Maya Pines's *Retarded Children Can Be Helped* (Channel Press, 1911; Crown\*); Pearl Buck's *The Child Who Never Grew* (John Day, 1917), where the novelist

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writes movingly about her child; Mary L. Burton and Sage Holter Jennings' *Your Child or Mine: The Story of the Cerebral Palsied Child* (Coward-McCann, 1919); Helmer R. Myklebust's *Your Deaf Child* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1910); Beatrice Wright's *Physical Disability: A Psychological Approach* (Harper, 1910) and Marie L. Killilea's *Karen* (Dell\*), a beautiful and courageous account of a mother and her cerebral-palsied child.

Marguerite Bro's *When Children Ask* (Harper, 1916) concentrates on religion from the point of view of a devout Christian, and Dorothy K. Whyte's *Teaching Your Child Right from Wrong* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1911) emphasizes that teaching ethical conduct is a slow, developmental task, literally from the cradle to the altar. *Talk It Out with Your Child* (McGraw-Hill, 1913), by Mary M. Thomson (with the editorial collaboration of Jean Marshall Simpson) is a work aimed at those with eight-to-twelve-year-old youngsters, stressing the necessity of frank discussion between parent and child as much as for its therapeutic value as for "clearing the air." Edith F. Hunter's *Conversations with Children* (Beacon Press, 1911) is for adults "who wish to develop skill in the art of conversing with boys and girls about the many things that interest or trouble them." It deals with six- through ten-year-olds, and if her avowed purpose seems somewhat artificial and excessively formal, her basic premises and methods are not. Christine Beasley's *Democracy in the Home* (Association Press, 1914) is a competently written work that places sex and love, religion and morality within the larger framework of the family.

Adoption is clearly explained in both Carl and Helen Doss's *Adoption and After* (Holt, 1917) and Ernest Cady's *We Adopted Three* (Sloane, 1912). Two succinct yet superb pamphlets cover much the same ground. Eda LeShan's "You and Your Adopted Child" (New York: Public Affairs Pamphlets,\* 1919) is wise and humane. Mrs. LeShan also collaborated with Mildred Rabinow in a pamphlet aimed at adopted children, "So You Are Adopted" (New Rochelle, New York: Guidance Center of New

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Rochelle,\* 481 Main Street, n.d.). Mary Ellison's *The Deprived Child and Adoption* (London: Pan Books,\* 1913) is British-oriented, but her discussions of prospective parents and adopted children are universal. Case studies are included along with information on children of racially mixed parentage and a fascinating historical treatment of the adoptive process.

James Lee Ellenwood is a grandfather. and his humorous and sensible *One Generation After Another* (Scribner's, 1913) portrays the eternal conflict between parents, grandparents, and children. He believes that the "odds are against the young; money, position, prestige, right of punishment" yet, in most cases the children generally win. Ellenwood emphasizes health, morality, intelligence and initiative rather than adjustment, obedience, and conformity. A somewhat more emphatic approach is taken by Hilde Bruch in her book, *Don't Be Afraid of Your Child* (Farrar, Straus & Young, 1912). She insists that parents ought to take their responsibilities more gracefully. "doing what comes naturally." She warns that so-called experts should not be allowed to sell parents a bill of goods, and make them nervous and overanxious. A forthcoming book that will represent a great stride toward sensible and intelligent parenthood will be Eda J. LeShan's *How to Survive Parenthood* (Random House: A Schain & Polner Book). Lastly, everyone responsible for a child should be aware of the Public Affairs Pamphlets, 381 Park Avenue South, New York 16, N.Y. For more than two decades pamphlets (25¢ each; special subscription rates available) such as "When a Family Faces Stress," "How to Help Your Handicapped Child," "When You Lose a Loved One," "Your Child's Sense of Responsibility," "Democracy Begins in the Home," "When Mental Illness Strikes Your Family," and many, many more have made the life of their readers more comprehensible.

Finally, a good writer can give us more insight into childhood than any title specifically designed for that purpose. Can anyone read John Gunther's grief-stricken yet soaring masterpiece *Death Be Not Proud* (Harper, 1919; Pyramid\*) without knowing the anguish of the parents of a doomed child? Carson McCullers'

## Bibliography

*Member of the Wedding* (Houghton Mifflin, 1910; Bantam\*) tells the story of Frankie, about twelve, who is in a state of change and revolt, her six-year-old brother, John Henry, and their maid Berenice, full of copybook maxims and a rough sympathy. Jean Giono's obscure volume, *Blue Boy* (Viking, 1916) is about life in rural France viewed through the innocent and watchful eyes of a young boy. Harper Lee's deservedly popular *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lippincott, 1910; Popular Library\*) tells the story of prejudice and violence in a southern town, but perhaps more interesting is the rearing of two bright, inquisitive youngsters by a widower. Richard Wright's classic *Black Boy* (Harper, 1917) is about one boy's painful growing up in Mississippi. The justly famous *Diary of Anne Frank* (Doubleday, 1912; Pocket Books\*) is a book of beauty and faith. John Steinbeck's *Red Pony* (Viking, 1919; Bantam\*) is the touching story of the dignity and trust a father and son share in life and death. James Agee's *A Death in the Family* (Obolensky, 1917; Avon\*) is a work of rare genius, the story of how a father's early death affects his son and his family.